

**Revenge tastes sweet, even if it is not
directed against the person who harmed us:**

***An Examination of Justice-Related Satisfaction after
Displaced Revenge***

Dissertation

zur

Erlangung des Doktorgrades

der Naturwissenschaften

(Dr. rer. nat.)

dem

Fachbereich Psychologie

der Philipps-Universität Marburg

vorgelegt von

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Marburg/Lahn März 2015

Vom Fachbereich Psychologie der Philipps-Universität Marburg als Dissertation am
28.05.2015 angenommen.

Erstgutachter: Prof. Dr. Mario Gollwitzer, Philipps-Universität Marburg

Zweitgutachter: Prof. Dr. Gerd Bohner, Universität Bielefeld

Tag der mündlichen Prüfung am 28.05.2015

“Revenge is wicked, and unchristian and in every way unbecoming, and I am not the man to countenance it or show it any favor. But it is powerful sweet, anyway.”

Mark Twain (1897)

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1 INTRODUCTION

On Friday morning, April 4th, 2014, the two Associated Press journalists, Anja Niedringhaus and Kathy Gannon, waited outside a government compound in the eastern city of Khost to cover the then upcoming elections in Afghanistan. Suddenly, Naqibullah, an Afghan police officer, walked up to their car and immediately opened fire on both women. Gannon survived heavily wounded, while Niedringhaus died instantly. After the attack, the shooter dropped his weapon and surrendered himself to the police. He later confessed that his attack was revenge for NATO air raids on his village (Crilly & Babakarkhail, 2014). Neither Anja Niedringhaus, nor Kathy Gannon, were responsible for or involved in these air raids that sparked the vengeful desire in Naqibullah. In that sense, his revenge¹ was *displaced* because it was not taken at those who actually carried out or commanded the air raids, but against those who were merely associated with this group. Sadly, this horrifying act of revenge is just one example among many. A glance at the newspapers suffices to become aware of the pervasiveness of this phenomenon. Consider, for example, the demolition of Palestinian homes by Israeli forces in November 2014, the beheading of James Foley by the radical Islamist terror group Islamic State in August 2014, or the brutal murder of Lee Rigby by Islamic extremists in May 2013. We encounter displaced revenge in various guises—violent conflicts, acts of terrorism and counter-terrorism, fights between rival street gangs (Vasquez, Wenborne, Peers, Alleyne, & Ellis, 2015), or even disputes between co-workers (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007). The notion that revenge is sometimes directed toward innocent people can also be traced back to the Bible. Most poignantly it is demonstrated in the example of Achan: for taking some of the forbidden property after the destruction of Jericho, not only Achan was executed, but also his whole family and livestock (Joshua 7:16-26).

¹ The terms retribution, vengeance, revenge, retaliation, and punishment will be used interchangeably in this Dissertation as they cannot be meaningfully distinguished (e.g., Gollwitzer, 2009, Vidmar, 2001).

Tragically, such acts of displaced revenge can carry devastating consequences. Attacks against innocent members of one's own group are likely to be seen as excessive, amoral, and by no means justified (Stillwell, Baumeister, & Del Priore, 2008). Displaced revenge, therefore, is likely to provoke counter-revenge and fuel the spread of conflict beyond the actual disputants to a multitude of others unfolding vicious cycles of mutual violence. However, despite its ubiquity, we still understand relatively little about the psychological dynamics and emotional consequences of displaced revenge. For example, can displaced revenge actually have hedonic benefits for avengers? Or more precisely, can such morally questionable behavior be satisfying? And if so, when exactly are avengers satisfied with displaced revenge? An exploration to these questions is not only important and interesting in and of itself, it may moreover tell us something meaningful about what avengers hope to achieve when taking displaced revenge. Seen from this angle, one may argue that avengers' satisfaction after revenge can perhaps be interpreted as an indicator that a certain goal underlying revenge has been fulfilled. For example, do avengers simply seek to impose "just deserts" upon the target of their revenge? Or is there more about displaced revenge, do avengers perhaps want to deliver a message, such as "don't mess with me!," to the actual offender and other members of his or her group?

The main goal of this Dissertation is to provide answers to the questions above. For this endeavor, the present work will look at the phenomenon of displaced revenge through the lens of justice psychology. This perspective is based on the premise that revenge is not irrational or immoral, but rather a functional and goal-driven response to injustice. Identifying the conditions under which displaced revenge can be satisfying for victims² and achieve a sense of restored justice, may therefore eventually contribute to a more refined understanding of vengeful desires and their driving forces. More broadly, it can give insight into the development, escalation, and perpetuation of violent group conflicts.

² In this Dissertation, the term "victim" refers to the later avenger (if not otherwise specified).

In the following sections, I will review the theoretical perspectives and empirical work that guide the present research. First, I provide an overview of how psychological justice research addressed the phenomenon of interpersonal (i.e., direct) revenge and what we know about the goals and functional features of revenge (Section 1.1). Next, I will delineate the previous theoretical and empirical work on displaced revenge or group-based retribution which is largely rooted in research on intergroup aggression (Section 1.2). In this context, I will introduce the concept of *entitativity*, which is indispensable for understanding how retribution can spread from the original offender to other members of the same group (Section 1.2.1). These sections set the stage for the novel predictions of the present research. In the concluding section of the Introduction, I will carve out how findings from both streams of research (i.e., research on direct revenge and research on group-based retribution) together may contribute to answer the questions raised above and discuss how entitativity may relate to the question on whether and when displaced revenge can be satisfying (Section 1.3).

1.1 Revenge as a Goal-Directed Response to Injustice

In the psychological literature, revenge is commonly defined as an action toward perceived harm or wrongdoing, which is intended to inflict damage, injury, discomfort, or punishment in return (Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2001; Stuckless & Goranson, 1992). The desire for revenge is a potent driving force behind various forms of violence and human destructiveness (e.g., Carlson & Miller, 1988; Daly & Wilson, 1988; Flynn, & Graham, 2010; Waldmann, 2001). Given the close link between revenge and violence it is not surprising that revenge has long been portrayed as an irrational behavior (Barreca, 1995; Jacoby, 1983; Nozick, 1981) or even as a psychological dysfunction (Hornsey, 1948; Summerfield, 2002). In fact, there are individual as well as collective negative consequences associated with revenge (see Schumann & Ross, 2010 for an overview). For example, taking revenge can increase victims' rumination about the offender and elicit negative affect (Carlsmith, Wilson,

& Gilbert, 2008). But revenge can also have positive consequences and provide hedonic benefits for avengers (e.g., Tripp & Bies, 1997). A neuro-imaging study, for example, found that taking revenge activates reward-related areas in the brain (de Quervain et al., 2004), thereby suggesting that revenge apparently can be satisfying or “sweet” as the popular saying goes. Such findings and the proverbial sweetness of revenge could easily lead to the assumption that it is the anticipated satisfaction that actually motivates people to seek revenge. However, empirical evidence speaks against such an “affect regulation hypothesis.” For example, participants who were led to believe that their mood is frozen and will not improve for a certain period of time, nevertheless, took revenge against a deviant partner in a public goods game. If revenge was motivated by affect regulation, the mood-freezing manipulation should have affected the propensity to take revenge (Gollwitzer & Bushman, 2012). Thus, people’s desire for revenge is not solely fueled by the mere expectation of hedonic benefits presumably gained from it. But what is it, then, that avengers strive for when taking revenge?

Several theorists argue that revenge is a reaction in response to perceived injustice (e.g., Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). In that perspective, vengeful actions may be directed toward various subordinate goals and serve multiple individual and social functions, such as deterring future harm, rebalancing status and power, restoration of self-worth, or escaping negative affect (Gollwitzer, 2009; Gollwitzer & Sjöström, in press; Vidmar, 2001; see also Frijda, 1994). The ultimate goal underlying vengeful actions, however, is to achieve subjective justice (e.g., Adams, 1963; Bies & Tripp, 1996; Cropanzano, Goldman, & Folger, 2003, Solomon, 1999). Thus, as mentioned above, feelings of satisfaction are not the reason why people take revenge, but rather a consequence of the perception that justice has been achieved. If revenge aims at restoring subjective justice, the question arises: what gives avengers the feeling that justice eventually has been restored?

One answer could be that a sense of subjective justice requires an equilibration of harm, that is, payback in an ultimate sense: The offender has made the victim suffer, and now the offender has to suffer in return. Thus, revenge may simply be motivated by a desire to even the “score of suffering” between the offender and the victim (see Frijda, 1994). In fact, if it is only the amount of suffering that needs to be balanced, then it should make no difference whether the offender’s suffering has been caused by the harmed victim or by fate. The empirical evidence, however, speaks against this notion. In one study (Gollwitzer, 2005), participants were asked to assume the role of a victim of injustice. Depending on experimental conditions, they should imagine (a) taking successful revenge, (b) that revenge failed, (c) that the offender suffered through fate, or (d) that nothing happened. Results demonstrate that satisfaction measured afterwards was lower in the fate, control, and revenge failed condition. Therefore, findings suggest that merely seeing the offender suffer through fate is not as satisfying as taking effective revenge.

An alternative answer to the question of what gives victims a sense of restored justice could be that revenge is only satisfying to the extent that it effectively delivers a message (“don’t mess with me!”) to the offender. In other words, the offender needs to know *why* revenge has been imposed on him or her (Miller, 2001). Philosopher Peter French (2001) likewise argued that “[r]evenge is a very personal matter, and when it is inflicted, it is important that the target grasps the reason why” (p. 12). Hence, revenge can only achieve its goal and be satisfying if the associated message is properly understood by the offender. One recent line of research tested this hypothesis experimentally (Gollwitzer & Denzler, 2009; Gollwitzer, Meder, & Schmitt, 2011). In one of the experiments, participants were confronted with a bogus partner who proposed a selfishly unfair distribution of resources in a cooperative task. Afterwards, they had the opportunity to take revenge against this person. Results show that taking revenge is more satisfying when offenders signal that they understood that revenge was a response to their prior unfair behavior. If no such connection was made, the potential

goal behind revenge remained unfulfilled and taking revenge was less satisfying (Gollwitzer et al., 2011, Study 2). These findings could also be replicated with a more unobtrusive measure of goal fulfillment. Gollwitzer and Denzler (2009) used a lexical decision task to measure the relative accessibility of goal-related concepts after revenge (i.e., words associated with aggression). Results show that a lower accessibility of aggression-related words was only observable when participants took revenge and received a message conveying the offender's understanding. More recently, the question what understanding signaled by the offender exactly implies was addressed in more detail. Results show that revenge evokes justice-related satisfaction when it leads to a moral change in the offender's attitudes toward the wrongdoing (Funk, McGeer, & Gollwitzer, 2014). Interestingly, there is even initial evidence for the validity of these dynamics in real-life instances beyond classical revenge dyads: U.S. Americans experienced higher levels of satisfaction, psychological closure, and a sense of restored justice to the extent that they believed that the assassination of former Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in May 2011 sent a strong message to the Taliban not to mess with the U.S. (Gollwitzer et al., 2014). Altogether, these findings are in line with the notion that revenge is satisfying when it effectively delivers a message like "don't mess with me!" Only when this message is understood, revenge elicits feelings of satisfaction and a subjective sense of justice. In line with communicative theories on punishment, one can therefore conceptualize revenge as an act of communication between the victim and the offender (see, e.g., Duff, 2001). More generally, the previous theoretical and empirical work suggests that revenge is a goal-driven response to injustice: the ultimate goal of revenge actions is to re-establish a subjective sense of justice. The present Dissertation seeks to expand this line of research to the domain of group-based retribution.

1.2 Displaced Revenge as a Facet of Group-Based Retribution

Group-based (or vicarious) retribution are acts of retribution, which are committed by or on behalf of a group and which, in turn, are directed toward a group or an individual as member of a group (Lickel, Miller, Stenstrom, Denson, & Schmader, 2006; Lickel, 2012). Such acts of group-based retribution are a core element in violent group conflicts, as they facilitate the spread of the conflict beyond the principal agents (i.e., victim and offender). *Displaced revenge* constitutes one facet of group-based retribution, which refers to revenge not taken against the initial offender, but against other members of his or her group. In recent years, such acts of displaced revenge have been investigated within the context of real-world conflicts. For example, reminding U.S. Americans of the 9/11 terrorist attacks triggered a desire for revenge, which lead to increased support for military interventions in Syria in 2013 (Washburn & Skitka, 2014). This finding suggests that vengeful desires can—even after a long period of time—translate into displaced vengeful actions. Relatedly, research conducted in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict demonstrates that following the reminder of a defeat, tendencies to seek displaced revenge can even be greater than direct revenge (Ein-Dor & Hirschberger, 2012). Thus, displaced revenge seems to be a viable behavioral response in intergroup conflicts, sometimes even if revenge against the actual offender is possible. These findings lead to the question: when or under which circumstances displaced revenge is more likely?

The study of the factors that influence the likelihood or magnitude of displaced revenge is rooted in aggression research. In 1939, Dollard, Miller, Doob, Mowrer, and Sears introduced the concept of “displaced aggression” to refer to situations in which provoked individuals tend to aggress against innocent third-parties, when the original source of provocation is not available for direct retaliation. Such acts of displaced aggression have been thoroughly investigated throughout the years. Moreover, they were conceptually advanced by adding the notion that the target is not entirely innocent, but provided a mild, ambiguous form

of provocation (a so-called “trigger”), which in consequence leads to an escalation of aggression (Miller, Pedersen, Earleywine, & Pollock, 2003). Notably, research on displaced or triggered displaced aggression is largely concerned with instances of interpersonal aggression. Whereas these instances have been mainly explained in terms of residual arousal and post-provocation rumination (Miller et al., 2003), this explanation may not suffice to understand more complex vengeful actions between groups or against individuals as members of a group (McCullough, Kurzban, & Tabak, 2010). Social categories or group memberships have initially received less attention in the social-psychological literature on displaced aggression (but see, e.g., Pedersen, Bushman, Vasquez, & Miller, 2008). However, recently the analysis of displaced aggression has been extended to the intergroup level to investigate more closely the factors that determine when people engage in group-based retribution. In particular, the substantial work of Lickel et al. (2006; see also Lickel, 2012) fueled the systematic investigation of the contextual factors that influence the likelihood of revenge against other individuals than the original offender (i.e., displaced revenge). These authors argued that the spread of retribution beyond the offender to other members of his or her group is more likely, when this group is perceived as highly *entitative*, that is, when members of a group are perceived to form a unified and coherent whole (Campbell, 1958). To receive a more detailed picture of the role of entitativity in displaced revenge, I will render the concept of entitativity more precisely in the following sections, delineate its perceptual antecedents and then outline how it exactly relates to displaced revenge.

1.2.1 Perceived Entitativity: Definition and Perceptual Roots

1.2.1.1 Definition and Clarification

In our daily lives, we encounter a wide variety of groups (e.g., families, working units, sport teams). Notably, all these groups widely differ in the extent to which they are seen to actually possess the quality of a “group” (Lickel et al., 2000). The term entitativity describes

this quality, or in Campbell's (1958) words "*The degree of having the nature of an entity, of having real existence*" (p. 17). Consider, for example, a group of people standing in line at a bank counter. In some sense, these people form a group, but members are diverse and the group is arbitrary in its composition and easily dissolvable. Therefore, this loose collection of individuals is prototypical for a *low entitative* group. Now think of a soccer team. Members of this group appear homogenous (i.e., they all wear the same jerseys) and are characterized by mutual interaction. They share common goals and are dependent on each other in order to achieve these group goals. A group like this would certainly be regarded as a *highly entitative* group. According to Hamilton (2007), the meaning of entitativity can be twofold: First, it can refer to the *actual properties* of a group (which corresponds to the cohesion of a group) or, second, to the *perception* of a group as a real entity rather than a mere collection of single individuals. Therefore, entitativity is also influenced by features of the individual perceiver (e.g., need for closure; Roets & Van Hiel, 2011).

Entitativity is a key variable in group perception that has strong impact on how we see groups in our social environment. Information about highly and low entitative groups are processed in different ways (e.g., Hamilton & Sherman, 1996; Crawford, Sherman, & Hamilton, 2002; Rydell & McConnell, 2005). More precisely, highly entitative groups evoke integrative processing (Hamilton, Sherman, & Castelli, 2002). For example, perceivers of highly entitative groups (compared to low entitative groups) recall more information about the respective group (McConnell, Sherman, & Hamilton, 1997), engage in more on-line (vs. memory based) processing (McConnell et al., 1997), make more polarized judgments (Castano, Sacchi, & Gries, 2003), and store group information in a different form (Johnson & Queller, 2003). Moreover, observers of highly entitative groups tend to spontaneously transfer attributes of one member to other members of that group (Crawford et al., 2002). Taken together, information about highly entitative groups are processed in ways that mimic the perception of individual targets (Brewer & Harasty, 1996; see also Malle, 2010).

Given that entitativity is a central aspect of group perception, it may also be important for understanding displaced revenge. Therefore, we have to ask how exactly impressions of entitativity are formed or, put differently, from which features we eventually infer a sense of entitativity.

1.2.1.2 Similarity and Interaction: The Perceptual Foundations of Entitativity

Entitativity is a complex and multidimensional construct (e.g., Hamilton, 2007; Hamilton, Sherman, & Rodgers, 2004). Consequently, previous research has stressed a wide range of variables that lead to perceptions of entitativity. Among these variables are interaction or interconnectedness (e.g., Gaertner & Shopler, 1998; Lickel, Rutchick, Hamilton, & Sherman, 2006), common fate and common goals (Lickel et al., 2000; Welbourne, 1999), synchronicity in movement (Lakens, 2010), importance of the group to its members (Lickel et al., 2000), and similarity (Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernst, 2000; Yzerbyt, Corneille, & Estrada, 2001). In attempts to integrate these findings, Ip, Chiu, and Wan (2006) proposed two different sets of variables that lead to perceptions of entitativity via distinct inferential routes—*similarity* and *interaction*³ (see also Brewer, Hong, & Li, 2004; Rutchick, Hamilton, & Sack, 2008).

First, perceptions of entitativity can arise from similarity or the degree to which individuals share the same characteristics (e.g., Brewer et al., 2004). In a strict sense, similarity can refer to certain perceptual features that all group members share (e.g., shirt colour). These similarities, in turn, can be an indicator of underlying psychological properties or characteristics which are shared by all members of a group (Rothbart & Taylor, 1992). For example, Ip et al. (2006) showed that physical similarity (i.e., skin tone of an artificial group) leads to greater entitativity via perceptions of common traits. Thus, physical properties (e.g.,

³ In Manuscript #1 the variable “interaction” was labeled “interconnectedness” on the recommendation of the editor. However, throughout this Dissertation, “interaction” (instead of “interconnectedness”) shall denote the degree of interaction among members of a group.

perceptual superficial similarity) give rise to perceptions of psychological similarities among individuals (see also Dasgupta, Banaji, & Abelson, 1999).

Second, entitativity can also be rooted in perceptions of mutual interaction and interdependence between individuals (e.g., Gaertner, Iuzzini, Witt, & Oriña, 2006; Igarashi & Kashima, 2011; Lickel et al., 2000). For example, agentic and highly interactive groups are perceived to share and act on common goals (cf. Kashima et al., 2005). Ip et al. (2006) could also provide evidence for that perceptual route: engaging in collective behavior (i.e., moving in the same direction) leads to greater entitativity via perceptions of shared goals among members.

This dual model of group perceptions roughly parallels earlier distinctions between categorical and dynamic groups as proposed by Wilder and Simon (1986). According to these authors, groups may be perceived categorically, that is based on similarities between members or, alternatively, perceived dynamically, that is based on interaction and relations among members. However, one should note that perceptions of similarity and interaction are not mutually exclusive. People may infer interaction from similarity between members and vice versa (see, e.g., Wilder, 1978).

1.2.2 Beyond the Offender: Perceived Entitativity and Collective Responsibility

Entitativity has not only been extensively studied as a key aspect of group perception, but also more specifically in the context of intergroup conflict. Whereas high entitativity is a positive property in one's own group (Yzerbyt, Castano, Leyens, & Paladino, 2000), it is perceived as a negative property in other groups. Highly entitative (vs. low entitative) groups are perceived to be more threatening and capable to engage in harmful actions against others (see Abelson, Dasgupta, Park, & Banaji, 1998; Castano et al., 2003; Dasgupta et al., 1999), they are attributed more intentionality (Malle, 2010; O'Laughlin & Malle, 2002), and elicit more moral suspicion (Newheiser, Sawaoka, & Dovidio, 2012). Crucially, high entitativity is

also associated with high levels of collective responsibility and blame. That is, individual members of highly entitative groups are seen as more responsible for negative acts committed by other members of their group. For example, Lickel, Schmader, and Hamilton (2003) investigated responsibility attributions in the context of the Columbine High school massacre on April 20, 1999. These authors show that perceptions of entitativity predicted the extent of responsibility which is attributed to several groups that were associated with the two perpetrators of the shootings—Harris and Klebold (e.g., teachers, counselors, the Trenchcoat Mafia⁴). Subsequent research substantiated the finding that individuals are seen as being (at least partially) responsible for the actions of their fellow group members when groups are highly entitative (Denson, Lickel, Curtis, Stenstrom, & Ames, 2006; Waytz & Young, 2012; see also Sherman & Percy, 2011). The question whether and how innocent individuals are held accountable concerned psychologists, legal scholars, and philosophers alike (e.g., Feinberg, 1970; Levinson, 2003; May, 1987; Sheehy, 2006; Tännsjö, 2007). In fact, at a first glance, it seems totally aberrational and morally questionable to ascribe responsibility to people who had no direct involvement in the offender's action. However, at a second glance this belief may change if we take the implications of group entitativity into account. Consider, for example, that one person out of a clique of friends suddenly starts a brawl in a pub. One might easily be inclined to think that his friends encouraged him to start the fight or at least missed to withhold him from doing so. In that sense, each member of this clique can be considered as individually responsible for the brawl due to his or her involvement in what was actually the action of one single person (see Hamilton et al., 2002).

This example clearly illustrates that people—when judging responsibility—often refer to the *indirect* causal role other group members may have played in facilitating an offense. Lickel et al. (2003) distinguish two different explanations that influence judgments about

⁴ A small group of self-appointed outcasts at Columbine High School to which Harris and Klebold belonged.

other members' causal role in the single offender's action, (1) responsibility by *omission* and (2) responsibility by *commission* (see also Lickel, 2012). The first inference is rooted in the belief that members of the same group could *and* should have prevented the offender's action (e.g., they failed to prevent their friend from starting the brawl in the pub). The second inference is based on the belief that members of the same group even encouraged the action (e.g., they encouraged their friend to start a brawl in the pub).

Besides causal inferences about an offense, responsibility and blame judgments, in general, are also influenced by dispositional information about individual offenders (e.g., Alicke, 2000). It is quite conceivable that the same holds true for collective blame. After an offense committed by one member of a highly entitative group, observers may judge other members of that group to possess the same blameworthy characteristics that define the offender (Lieberman, 2006; Lickel et al., 2006; see also Rothbart & Taylor, 1992; Yzerbyt et al., 2001; Yzerbyt, Rogier, & Fiske, 1998). Indeed, research shows that in highly entitative groups, attributes of a single group member are likely transferred to other members (Crawford et al., 2002). The perception of an "evil" or blameworthy character of other group members, in turn, might strengthen inferences about their approval of and perhaps support for the offense. Therefore, attributions of negative dispositional qualities of each group member likely amplify responsibility judgments about individuals beyond the offender (e.g., Lickel, 2012).

1.2.3 Displaced Revenge and Entitativity

Given the extensive evidence on the negative expectations about and evaluations of highly entitative (out)groups, it is not surprising that entitativity is associated with an array of negative responses toward such groups. For example, entitativity amplifies intergroup responses and leads to greater stereotyping (Rydell, Hugenberg, Ray, & Mackie, 2007; Spencer-Rodgers, Hamilton, & Sherman, 2007) and stronger out-group discrimination

(Gaertner & Shopler, 1998; Moscatelli & Rubini, 2013). Importantly, given that entitativity increases perceptions of collective responsibility (see Section 1.2.2), entitativity can provide a true or strategic justification for revenge against other individuals than the original offender and therefore promotes displaced revenge (Lickel et al., 2006).

Consistent with this notion, recent empirical evidence shows that entitativity leads to increased retributive judgments directed at an entire group in response to a misdeed by a few members (Pereira, Berent, Falomir-Pichastor, Staerklé, & Butera, 2015). In the same way, people are more willing to target individuals beyond the original offender when the offender's group is perceived as highly entitative (Stenstrom, Lickel, Denson, & Miller, 2008), and behave more aggressively toward a high (vs. low) entitative group, after feeling rejected by a single member of that group (Gaertner, Iuzzini, & O'Mara, 2008). Likewise, observers favor more severe punishments for a group (Newheiser et al., 2012) if the group was manipulated to be highly (vs. low) entitative. Survey studies conducted in the U.S. provide further indirect support. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, hate crimes in the United States against Arab-Americans, Muslims, and similar targets that share visual similarity with a stereotypic Al-Qaeda terrorist increased drastically (Skitka, Saunders, Morgan, & Wisneski, 2009). Complementing this evidence, results from qualitative interviews further suggest that collectivist cultures—which have a stronger sense of out-group entitativity—are more prone to channel their vengeful desires toward targets beyond actual offenders (Gelfand et al., 2012). Recent research also hints at the complex role of entitativity by demonstrating that high entitativity can even result in less severe retributive judgments if counter-retaliation by a strong offender group is possible (Newheiser & Dovidio, 2014). Nevertheless, a large body of research suggests that entitativity of the offender group increases the likelihood of displaced revenge. This finding is, moreover, echoed in earlier meta-analytical results, which show that the more similar the target was to the provocateur, the greater the amount of aggression displaced onto that target (Marcus-Newhall, Pedersen, Carlson, & Miller, 2000).

Taken together, the notion that entitativity increases the likelihood of displaced revenge is empirically backed by different independent researchers in different contexts. Notably, this previous research only examined under which circumstances displaced revenge is *more likely*, but it can tell us nothing about the emotional or justice-related consequences of displaced revenge. For example, does revenge against innocent targets can actually feel good? Moreover, this research leaves open what avengers hope to achieve by taking displaced revenge. For example, do avengers merely want to bring just deserts to any member of the offender's group? Or is there more about displaced revenge? Do avengers perhaps want to send a message to the offender and other members of his or her group? The present Dissertation seeks to fill this gap and explore these questions.

1.3 The Present Research

This Dissertation investigates a core element of group-based retribution, namely: displaced revenge. For this endeavor, the present research draws on previous theoretical and empirical work on group-based retribution and ties it with psychological justice research. Such an integrative perspective may not only advance our understanding of vengeful desires, it can also provide the conceptual and methodological framework to empirically study acts of displaced revenge. Altogether, five studies will be presented that explore the conditions under which displaced revenge may lead to feelings of satisfaction and a sense of "justice achieved" (i.e., justice-related satisfaction). The present analysis, in addition, expands prior research on displaced revenge by using a higher "focal length." In specific, this means that (a) it concentrates on situations in which the later avenger was personally harmed (and not collectively), and that (b) revenge is targeted at one specific innocent member of the offender's group (and not at the entire group including the original offender). This enables us to take a closer look at the mechanism underlying displaced revenge onto other targets apart

from desires to punish the original offender. In the following sections, the specific assumptions that guided the current work will be developed.

1.3.1 Can Displaced Revenge be Satisfying?

A large body of work examined the factors that increase the likelihood of displaced revenge, leaving open whether acts of displaced revenge can actually be satisfying and capable to elicit a sense of restored justice. The likelihood or magnitude of displaced revenge, however, can be totally unrelated to participants' satisfaction after displaced revenge. Though people under certain circumstances (e.g., when direct revenge is prevented) may take revenge against other persons than the original offender, it does not necessarily imply that they feel satisfied afterwards. Given the basic norm not to harm innocent people, displaced revenge is likely perceived to be immoral or unethical (Barton, 1999; Rupp & Bell, 2010; Uniacke, 2000). For example, people who unjustifiably aggress against an innocent target are evaluated more negatively (Lincoln & Levinger, 1972). Likewise, avengers retaliating against innocent third-parties may afterwards realize that they have done something wrong and thus feel "bad" about themselves (see Donnerstein & Hatfield, 1982). In the same vein, Denzler, Förster, and Liberman (2009) found that behaving vengeful against a displaced target (even if similar to the actual harm-doer) does not necessarily suffice to induce a sense of aggressive goal fulfillment. Taken together, it seems reasonable to assume that displaced revenge cannot actually be satisfying for avengers. This Dissertation, however, suggests the novel hypothesis that displaced revenge can be satisfying when the group to which the offender and the target belong is perceived as highly entitative. It is conceivable that there are at least two ways in which entitativity relates to post-revenge satisfaction: First, if an offender's group is highly entitative, perceptions of responsibility are extended to other members than the actual offender (see Section 1.2.2). Consequently, individual members of highly entitative groups are viewed as responsible for the negative acts committed by the actual offender (e.g., Denson

et al., 2006; Waytz & Young, 2012). Revenge against any member of a highly entitative offender group may therefore be perceived as legitimate in the eyes of the victim and hence lead to feelings of satisfaction. Second, based on the notion that displaced revenge might serve to deliver a message, the current work suggests a new and broadened perspective on the role of entitativity within displaced revenge contexts. High (vs. low) entitativity may not only influence perceived collective responsibility, it furthermore can signal whether retaliating against any member actually increases the chances that a potential message embedded in revenge (“don’t mess with me!”) is also effectively delivered to and understood by the original offender and perhaps other members of his or her group. As already mentioned, entitativity refers to the extent to which a collection of individuals is perceived to be bonded together (e.g., Lickel et al., 2000; Rutchick et al., 2008). Importantly, the stronger these bonds are, the more opportunities are available for members to communicate and exchange messages, such as news and rumors with each other (Lott & Lott, 1961; see also Weenig & Midden, 1991). Therefore, the chances that a potential revenge message is spread within the offender group are probably perceived to be higher in highly (vs. low) entitative groups.

It should be noted that both roles of entitativity discussed here are not mutually exclusive. They may rather jointly contribute to satisfaction after displaced revenge. Given that fellow group members of the offender are seen as being (at least partially) responsible, it is likely considered important that the message is not only delivered to the offender, but to other group members as well (see Gollwitzer & Sjöström, in press). Taken together, this reasoning leads to the hypothesis that displaced revenge can be satisfying if the offender’s group is perceived as high (vs. low) in entitativity. This prediction is tested in Studies 1 to 3 (Manuscript #1).

1.3.2 How Do Perceptions of Similarity and Interaction Relate to Avengers’

Satisfaction?

As mentioned above, research shows that two features of groups can lead to the perception of entitativity: similarities between individuals and the extent of interaction among individuals. Both features have distinct contributions to group perceptions (e.g., Hamilton, Chen, & Way, 2011). Distinguishing between similarity and interaction may therefore provide important insights into the mechanism underlying displaced revenge. However, to date, no research has investigated the role of similarity and interaction on displaced revenge.

In general, similarity (vs. interaction) is a weaker predictor of entitativity (e.g., Lickel et al., 2000) and may thus not be sufficient to elicit the evaluative, emotional, and behavioral responses that are typically associated with perceptions of overall entitativity (see, e.g., Crump, Hamilton, Sherman, Lickel, & Thakkar, 2010; Welbourne, 1999). For example, manipulating mere similarities between members of a criminal group did not influence the magnitude of punishment (Alter & Darley, 2009). By contrast, mutual interaction seems to allow more inferences about the group and its members and may therefore be particularly informative when judging other group members’ indirect involvement in the offender’s action (see Lickel et al., 2003). In addition, and importantly, interaction should be more central to displaced revenge given the assumption that avengers hope to deliver a message. It is in particular the interaction among group members (but not the mere similarity) that is supposed to increase the chances that a message embedded in displaced revenge is spread within the offender’s group.

Taken together, this reasoning suggests that it is rather questionable whether superficial similarity alone is sufficient to elicit satisfaction in avengers after displaced revenge. Individuals who are similar to the original offender may be perceived to share the same blameworthy qualities that define the original offender which, in turn, may deem them as appropriate revenge targets (see Section 1.2.2). However, if members do not interact with

each other, a potential revenge message cannot be delivered to and eventually understood by the offender and perhaps other members. Therefore, mutual interaction as a cue to entitativity seems more central to elicit satisfaction after displaced revenge. Study 3 (Manuscript #1) is the first research that investigates similarity and interaction orthogonally in order to test whether similarity, interaction, or both are necessary to make displaced revenge satisfying for avengers.

1.3.3 Just Deserts or Delivering a Message?

Prior research suggests that punishment decisions are largely driven by pure retributive concerns (e.g., Carlsmith, Darley, & Robinson, 2002; Carlsmith, 2006; Keller, Oswald, Stucki, & Gollwitzer, 2010; for a review, see Carlsmith & Darley, 2008). Therefore, in contrast to the notion that displaced revenge serves to deliver a message, victims' motivation for displaced revenge may simply follow a retributivist (or deservingness) perspective (Kant, 1797/1990). According to this perspective, retributive actions are backward-oriented and driven by concerns to deliver punishment appropriate to the severity and moral wrongfulness of a given harm. This reasoning would suggest that displaced revenge is an end in itself and that avengers may simply seek to give "just deserts" to the target of revenge. As reviewed in Section 1.2.2, research on group perception and collective responsibility points to the conclusion that the more entitative a group is perceived to be, the more its members are perceived to be individually accountable for the decisions and actions of the offender (see Sherman & Percy, 2011). Therefore, each member of a highly entitative group—even if not directly involved—may be seen as a "quasi-offender," equally deserving of punishment. Following this reasoning, displaced revenge would be satisfying because it simply serves to give just deserts to the target for an offense s/he contributed to in the eyes of the avenger. Thus, high entitativity would be *de rigueur* for both the "just deserts explanation" as well as the "message explanation."

One way to elucidate in the first place whether displaced revenge primarily serves to give targets their just deserts or whether it potentially serves to deliver a message which also has to be received by the original offender is to look at *group permanence*. For example, if displaced revenge is satisfying because it serves to simply punish a quasi-offender, it should make no difference whether the offender's group dissolved, still exists, or whether the offender meanwhile left the group. Each single member has incurred individual responsibility for the decisions and action of the offender and therefore deserves punishment. By contrast, if displaced revenge serves to send a message also to the offender this would require the group to continue to exist in its original form including the offender. Only when the offender's group continues to exist can a potential revenge message be spread and eventually delivered to the original offender. The question whether displaced revenge solely serves to impose just deserts upon a quasi-offender or whether it potentially serves to deliver a message to the original offender is addressed in Study 4 (Manuscript #2).

Conceptualizing displaced revenge as a message is inevitably related to the question to whom exactly such a message should be delivered. In interpersonal contexts, the message embedded in revenge is, of course, directed to the offender. However, in displaced revenge contexts this question is more complicated to answer. Given the two critical members of an offender's group in displaced revenge contexts (i.e., original offender and the target), the question arises whether only the offender, only the target, or maybe both have to understand why revenge was taken. In light of the evidence on collective responsibility, one might plausibly expect that the target and the offender eventually have to understand why revenge was taken. However, two alternative points of view are reasonable: First, one might argue that revenge aims at delivering a message particularly to the original offender, the initial cause of harm. In that sense, the target would perhaps be seen as a "messenger" on behalf of the victim, carrying the message to the actual offender. Whether the target gets the message would thus not be relevant. For example, in Stenstrom's et al. article (2008) still 63% (of

those who stated some desire to take revenge at other members of the offender's group) had a stronger motivation to retaliate against the specific offender who caused the harm. Second, one may argue that it suffices if any member of the offender's group gets the message and understands why revenge was taken. As the above reviewed evidence suggests, members of highly entitative groups are perceived as psychologically interchangeable and substitutable for each other (e.g., Crawford et al., 2002; Kashima et al., 2005). In its ultimate sense, substitutability of members could imply that one member can be punished vicariously for another. Hence, any member of the offender's group may serve as a viable target instead of the actual offender for one's revenge and for the message it entails. The goal of Study 5 (Manuscript #2) was to examine more precisely whether displaced revenge serves to deliver a message, and if so, to whom exactly this message is addressed. For this purpose, a lab experiment was conducted, in which target and offender reactions to revenge were manipulated.

2 SUMMARY OF MANUSCRIPTS

This Dissertation includes five studies which are presented in two manuscripts. All studies explored the conditions under which displaced revenge may lead to the experience of satisfaction and restored justice. In addition, Studies 1 to 3 (Manuscript #1) investigated whether acts of displaced revenge can lead to an alleviation of feelings of regret about the vengeful action. In Studies 1 and 2, the degree of entitativity displayed by the offender's group (high vs. low) and the type of revenge (direct vs. displaced) was manipulated. Study 1 was an online vignette study, in which participants ($N = 169$) were instructed to assume the role of the protagonist in a revenge scenario. Results show that taking displaced revenge against an uninvolved target alleviates feelings of regret, but did not lead to more justice-related satisfaction when the offender's group was high (vs. low) in entitativity. In Study 2, participants ($N = 89$) were asked to recall a particular situation from their own experience in which they were personally harmed and felt the desire to take revenge. The described situation was then complemented by counterfactual information on the offender's group entitativity. Results show that taking displaced revenge increases justice-related satisfaction, but did not alleviate feelings of regret. Study 3 was designed to examine how similarities between members and interaction among members contribute to justice-related satisfaction. For this purpose, a laboratory study was conducted, in which similarity and interaction were manipulated independently from each other. Instead of merely imagining to take revenge, participants ($N = 72$) were given the opportunity to actually exact revenge against a third-person. Results suggest that avengers experienced the highest level of satisfaction when the offender's group was perceived to be strongly interactive and, at the same time, similar in appearance. As in Study 2, no effect on regret could be observed. Findings reported in Manuscript #1 were not consistent across the three studies. Specifically, the proposed effect

on justice-related satisfaction was significant in Studies 2 and 3, but not in Study 1.

Conversely, the proposed effect on regret was significant in Study 1, but not in Studies 2 and 3. To clarify this inconsistency, a fixed effects meta-analysis across the three studies reported in Manuscript #1 was conducted. Results speak to the robustness of entitativity on justice-related satisfaction, but not on regret. Taken together, Manuscript #1 demonstrates that avengers experience satisfaction and a sense of restored justice when the target and the original offender belong to a highly entitative group; more precisely, a group whose members are perceived to be interactive and similar in appearance.

Having established the effect of entitativity on justice-related satisfaction in Studies 1 to 3, Studies 4 and 5 (Manuscript #2) aimed at investigating the psychological dynamics underlying displaced revenge in more detail. The goal of Study 4 was to examine whether displaced revenge primarily serves to give targets their just deserts or whether it potentially serves to deliver a message which has to be received by the original offender. For this purpose, an online vignette study was conducted in which participants ($N = 277$) were instructed to assume the role of a protagonist in a revenge scenario. In this study, it was manipulated, whether the offender's group continued to exist in its original form, whether the offender left the group, or whether the entire group dissolved after the offense (i.e., group permanence). Results show that displaced revenge was less satisfying when the group of the offender dissolved or when the offender left the group. By contrast, avengers experienced more satisfaction when the offender's group continued to exist. These findings suggest that displaced revenge does not serve to solely impose just deserts upon the target. They rather lend indirect support to the notion that displaced revenge aims at delivering a message.

Study 5 investigated to whom exactly a potential revenge message is addressed in displaced revenge contexts. Participants of this study ($N = 121$) took revenge in a laboratory paradigm similar to Study 3. As an indicator of the successfully delivery of a message, it was manipulated whether the offender and/or the target understood why revenge was taken.

Results of Study 5 suggest that displaced revenge serves to deliver a message and that this message has to be understood by the original offender and the target of revenge to elicit feelings of justice-related satisfaction.

Taken together, findings reported in Manuscript #2 speak against the notion that displaced revenge serves solely to impose just deserts on the target. Rather, findings corroborate the notion that displaced revenge aims at delivering a message to the offender and the target of displaced revenge.

3 MANUSCRIPT #1

Sjöström, A., & Gollwitzer, M. (2015). Displaced revenge: Can revenge taste “sweet” if it aims at a different target? *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 56, 191–202.



Displaced revenge: Can revenge taste “sweet” if it aims at a different target?

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Displaced revenge is targeted at a different person than the original transgressor.
- We examine conditions under which displaced revenge can be satisfying.
- Displaced revenge is satisfying when the transgressor group is highly entitative.
- Interconnectedness and similarity between transgressor and target are both important.
- Displaced revenge is goal-directed and can achieve a sense of justice.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 18 March 2014

Revised 26 September 2014

Available online 5 October 2014

Keywords:

Revenge

Justice

Displaced revenge

Entitativity

Vicarious retribution

ABSTRACT

This article investigates whether acts of displaced revenge, that is, revenge targeted at a different person than the original transgressor, can be satisfying for the avenger. We assume that displaced revenge can lead to justice-related satisfaction when the group to which the original transgressor and the displaced target belong is highly entitative. Two experimental online studies show that displaced revenge leads to less regret (Study 1; $N = 169$) or more satisfaction (Study 2; $N = 89$) when the transgressor and the displaced target belong to a group that is perceived as highly entitative. Study 3 ($N = 72$) shows that avengers experience more satisfaction when members of the transgressor group were manipulated to be both strongly interconnected and similar in their appearance. Results of an internal meta-analysis furthermore corroborate the notion that displaced revenge leads to more satisfaction when the transgressor group is highly entitative. Taken together, our findings suggest that even displaced revenge can achieve a sense of justice in the eyes of avengers.

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Introduction

On the afternoon of May 23, 2013, the 25-year old British soldier Lee Rigby was attacked and brutally killed by two Islamic extremists in Woolwich, southeast London. Soon after the killing, a video appeared on the Internet in which one of the murderers proclaimed that “The only reason we have killed this man today is because Muslims are dying daily by British soldiers [...] And this British soldier is one. It is an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (Rayner & Swinford, 2013). Lee Rigby was obviously murdered to avenge the killing of Muslims by the British military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. This brutal act exemplifies that violence can spread beyond the initial agents of a conflict and that even innocent people are suddenly deemed as appropriate targets for retaliation. This phenomenon appears in many guises—terrorism, war, or gang fights. What all of these instances have in common is

that they are acts of revenge, and that these vengeful reactions are targeted against people who were entirely uninvolved in the act that sparked these vengeful desires. In that sense, the murder of Lee Rigby was *displaced* because he was not a perpetrator himself, but merely a member of the perpetrator group.

Interestingly, these acts of *displaced revenge* or *vicarious retribution*¹ (Lickel, Miller, Stenstrom, Denson, & Schmader, 2006) have not received abundant attention in the social-psychological literature so far. Previous research (Stenstrom, Lickel, Denson, & Miller, 2008) investigated which factors promote acts of displaced revenge, but has not yet considered whether displaced revenge can actually be satisfying (“sweet”) for victims. However, the question whether revenge targeted at a different person than the original provocateur can be satisfying is not only an interesting question in and of itself, but it may also be useful in elucidating under which circumstances such acts can possibly be successful in a sense that they fulfill a need or reach a goal. The present research is the first to

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¹ The terms retribution, vengeance, revenge, punishment, and retaliation will be used interchangeably in this article.

address this question in a context in which participants were personally victimized and took revenge against another person who was uninvolved in the initial harm-doing. Identifying the conditions under which even displaced revenge can be satisfying is supposed to contribute to a deeper and more refined understanding of vengeful desires, their motivational forces, and their emotional consequences.

The sweetness of revenge

Displaced revenge can be defined as retributive reactions toward a prior transgression that are not directed against the original transgressor(s), but rather against uninvolved targets. Thus, displaced revenge represents one facet of “group-based retribution,” which refers to repeated cycles of vengeful acts committed by members of two (or more) opposing groups (cf. Lickel, 2012). These cycles are often a core element of intractable conflicts between groups; they are highly emotional, often violent, and particularly difficult to stop.

So far, the social psychological literature has focused on the contextual conditions that make displaced revenge likely to occur. One of these conditions is the extent to which the perpetrator group is perceived as “entitative,” that is, as a coherent and unified entity (Lickel et al., 2006). The more members of the victimized group perceive the perpetrator group as entitative, the more likely displaced revenge occurs, that is, the more likely will retaliatory acts be directed against the entire target group, no matter whether other members were involved in the original victimization (Stenstrom et al., 2008). Notably, this research illuminates under which circumstances acts of displaced revenge are more likely to occur, but it does not provide an answer to the question of whether acts of displaced revenge are actually *satisfying* for victims and lead to a sense of re-established justice. However, this question is of considerable importance for understanding the psychological dynamics underlying acts of displaced revenge, and especially for the question whether displaced revenge can be conceptualized as a goal-directed behavior. If revenge is indeed goal-directed, feelings of satisfaction, a sense re-established justice, and a state of psychological closure should indicate that the goal – whatever it is – has been achieved. For instance, research on revenge in dyadic interactions (Gollwitzer, Meder, & Schmitt, 2011) has shown that revenge does not feel good unless the target of one's vengeful reactions understands why revenge has been taken against him or her. More recent research shows that revenge leads to the experience of justice-related satisfaction when it affects a change in the offender's attitudes (Funk, McGeer, & Gollwitzer, 2014). These findings were also replicated with a more unobtrusive measure of goal-attainment (Gollwitzer & Denzler, 2009): participants who successfully took revenge showed higher levels of implicit goal fulfillment (i.e., a reduced accessibility of aggression-related words). Taken together, this research suggests that revenge is indeed goal-directed: it aims at delivering a message to the offender (“don't mess with me”). Thus, in intergroup conflicts, it would be plausible to assume that group-based revenge aims at delivering a message to the perpetrator group (“don't mess with us;” see Gollwitzer et al., 2014).

The present research aims at elucidating whether even displaced revenge can be satisfying and lead to perceptions of justice achieved. This is by no means a trivial issue: some studies suggest that acts of revenge may lead to feelings of regret, guilt, and shame (Boon, Alibhai, & Deveau, 2011; Crombag, Rassin, & Horselenberg, 2003; Tripp & Bies, 1997), and that avengers tend to overestimate the extent to which revenge feels sweet (Carlsmith, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2008). So what about displaced revenge? It is quite likely to assume that revenge does *not* lead to feelings of satisfaction and justice achieved if the target of one's vengeful reaction is not identical with the original perpetrator. After all, taking revenge against a target that was not involved in the initial transgression obviously violates the principles of justice (Barton, 1999) and may be judged as morally wrong or unethical (e.g., Rupp & Bell, 2010; Uniacke, 2000). However, we will argue that even displaced revenge can sometimes taste sweet under certain

conditions. The condition we focus on in the present research is the extent to which the target of one's vengeful act and the original perpetrator belong to a highly entitative group (see Gollwitzer & Sjöström, *in press*). The theoretical rationale underlying this hypothesis will be developed in the following sections.

Displaced revenge and group entitativity

The term “entitativity” describes the extent to which an aggregate of individuals is perceived as a unified and coherent entity (Campbell, 1958). Consider a group of people waiting at a bus stop: These people do form a group, but members are heterogeneous in appearance and only loosely connected to each other. The group is arbitrary in its composition and easily dissolvable; in other words, it is prototypical for a low-entitativity group. Now consider two sports teams playing against each other. Group members within each team are homogeneous in appearance (they all wear the same jerseys) and strongly dependent on each other in order to achieve a common goal. Such a group can be considered high in entitativity.

Entitativity has been investigated in the context of group perceptions (e.g., McConnell, Sherman, & Hamilton, 1997) and intergroup conflicts. For instance, perceptions of entitativity are associated with intergroup threat (i.e., high-entitativity groups are perceived as more threatening than low-entitativity groups; Abelson, Dasgupta, Park, & Banaji, 1998), attributions of collective blame to a group for an individual group member's actions (Denson, Lickel, Curtis, Stenstrom, & Ames, 2006), and the likelihood of group-directed aggression (Gaertner & Iuzzini, 2005). For example, people behaved more aggressively toward an out-group when they felt rejected (Gaertner, Iuzzini, & O'Mara, 2008) and supported more severe punishments for transgressor groups (Newheiser, Sawaoka, & Dovidio, 2012) if these groups were perceived as highly (vs. low) entitative. In this sense, entitativity may function as a targeting system indicating who is a suitable substitute for the original transgressor.

While, at first glance, it seems irrational and morally questionable to take revenge against an individual who was not personally involved in the initial transgression, things might be different if both the transgressor and the target belong to a highly entitative group. For example, empirical evidence suggests that in highly entitative groups the responsibility of a single transgressor dilutes, whereas responsibility of the entire group increases (Sherman & Percy, 2010; Waytz & Young, 2012). More precisely, people believe that members of such highly entitative groups could *and* should have prevented the transgressor's action, or even actively promoted the initial transgression (Lickel, Schmader, & Hamilton, 2003; see also Lickel, 2012). In addition, such responsibility judgments may be influenced by beliefs that the target and the initial transgressor share the same blameworthy characteristics that make her/him an appropriate target for retaliation (e.g., Lickel et al., 2006). Thus, revenge against any member of a highly entitative group can be perceived as legitimate from the victims' perspective and therefore leads to feelings of satisfaction.

Interconnectedness and similarity: two facets of entitativity

In the literature on group perception, two different ways of construing entitativity are distinguished: (1) group membership can be defined by sharing commonalities and similarities in appearances (i.e., superficial similarities), or (2) group membership can be defined by mutual interaction, interdependence and interconnectedness between group members (Rutchick, Hamilton, & Sack, 2008; Wilder & Simon, 1998; see also Brewer, Hong, & Li, 2004). Adding to a long line of theorizing on this distinction, recent research shows that perceptions of entitativity can arise from both superficial similarities and interconnectedness (Ip, Chiu, & Wan, 2006).

First, entitativity based on superficial similarities (e.g., similar appearance) evokes inferences about psychological homogeneity (Dasgupta, Banaji, & Abelson, 1999; Rothbart & Taylor, 1992). In this

vein, survey studies show that in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, hate crimes against Arab Americans, Muslims, and similar targets strongly increased in the U.S. (Morgan, Wisneski, & Skitka, 2011; Skitka, Saunders, Morgan, & Wisneski, 2009). This finding suggests that solely superficial similarities deemed innocent Arab Americans as being appropriate targets for Americans' revenge for the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Accordingly, the amount of retaliatory aggression displaced onto another target is greater the more superficially similar the target was to the initial transgressor (Marcus-Newhall, Pedersen, Carlson, & Miller, 2000; Moore, 1964).

Second, entitativity is also derived from perceptions of interconnectedness between individuals (e.g., Gaertner & Schopler, 1998; Hamilton, Sherman, & Lickel, 1998; Igarashi & Kashima, 2011). Following this line of argumentation, perceivers attend to the dynamic processes that underlie group behavior rather than their mere physical appearance. Groups engaging in collective behavior are perceived to share common goals and hence are attributed stronger cohesiveness, which, in turn, is also related to the degree of intra-group communication (Lott & Lott, 1961). Ip et al. (2006), for example, showed that the synchronicity of movement displayed by fictitious cartoon creatures leads to attribution of entitativity mediated via perceptions of common goals. Thus, besides superficial similarity, frequent interactions and interconnectedness among members within a group are also strongly connected to perceptions of entitativity (e.g., Lickel, Rutchick, Hamilton, & Sherman, 2006; Lickel et al., 2000). But how exactly do these two different routes to the perception of entitativity relate to avengers' feelings of satisfaction? A fine-grained analysis of entitativity may give us a deeper insight into the mechanisms underlying displaced revenge. Superficial similarity may be able to create a sense of shared responsibility among previously uninvolved members and the transgressor in the eyes of the avenger. But it is questionable that superficial similarity alone is sufficient to make displaced revenge a satisfying experience for the avenger. Building upon the notion that revenge aims at delivering a message ("don't mess with me;" Gollwitzer et al., 2011), one could expect that interconnectedness and communication between group members (but not similarity alone) increase chances that the message underlying revenge is spread and eventually understood. Thus, a critical degree of similarity among members might be necessary; but to make displaced revenge a satisfying experience it may also be important that members interact as one collective entity. Taken together, we argue that displaced revenge has more hedonic benefits (i.e., less regret and more justice-related satisfaction) when it is directed against a target that belongs to a highly (vs. low) entitative group together with the actual transgressor. However, whether similarity, interconnectedness, or both are necessary to make displaced revenge a satisfying experience for the avenger is an open question.

The present research

In this article, we test under which conditions displaced revenge can be satisfying for the avenger and capable of establishing a subjective sense of justice. We will do so by using different experimental paradigms and techniques. Based on the theoretical assumptions and empirical evidence outlined above, we argue that the degree of group entitativity is crucial in that regard. First, we hypothesize that displaced revenge leads to feelings of satisfaction and a sense of justice achieved if the target and the original perpetrator belong to a highly (vs. low) entitative social category (Studies 1 and 2). In both studies we manipulate (1) the degree of entitativity of the group the transgressor belongs to, and (2) whether participants have the opportunity to take either direct revenge (i.e., addressed at the original transgressor) or displaced revenge (i.e., addressed at another member from the transgressor's group). Second, regarding the two facets of entitativity, we explore whether superficial similarity, interconnectedness, or both are necessary to make displaced revenge a satisfying experience for avengers (Study 3). Apart from

justice-related satisfaction, we measured regret about displaced revenge in all three studies to examine whether negative feelings are alleviated when the displaced target and the original perpetrator are members of a highly entitative group.

Study 1

The goal of Study 1 was to examine whether acts of displaced revenge can have hedonic benefits for avengers. For this purpose, we conducted an online vignette study, in which participants were instructed to imagine themselves as protagonists of a revenge scenario. The experimental design of Study 1 included an act of revenge, which was either *directly* taken against the initial harm-doer or *displaced* against a third-person. In addition, we manipulated the degree of entitativity of the transgressor's group. We expect that participants experience more justice-related satisfaction and less regret when the group to which the target and the transgressor belong is highly (vs. low) entitative.

Method

Procedure

Participants for this vignette study were recruited via various online forums. In return for participation, respondents were rewarded with a raffle ticket for an MP3-Player. They were randomly assigned to experimental conditions in a 2 (entitativity: low vs. high) \times 2 (revenge: direct vs. displaced) between-subjects design. Participants read a short vignette in which a protagonist was treated unfairly by a transgressor. To make it easier for participants to immerse themselves in the role of the protagonist of the vignette, they could choose an area of personal relevance (either "university" or "working life"), which provided the general setting for the scenarios. Both vignettes contained a situation in which the protagonist was provoked by a person and took revenge afterwards, either against the original transgressor or against a different target (i.e., an innocent person who was related to the transgressor). The sex of the transgressor and the target of the vignette were matched with participants' gender. To manipulate perceived entitativity, these vignettes furthermore included a description of a group the transgressor belongs to (see below).

The "working life" vignette ($M = 313$ words) described how the protagonist was heavily and unjustifiably criticized before the management board by a colleague ("Christian" or "Christiane") from a different department. Participants learned that Christian/Christiane did so in order to enhance her/his own chances (and to reduce the protagonist's chances) of becoming promoted, a thing s/he had already done in the past. Next, participants learned that Christian/Christiane was awarded with the promotion. The "university" vignette ($M = 269$ words) described a situation in which the protagonist had to prepare an important examination. A fellow student ("Christian" or "Christiane") borrowed the only copies of the relevant books from the library. When the protagonist asked Christian/Christiane whether s/he would be willing to lend them to make a copy, Christian/Christiane pretended that s/he did not have the books, although the protagonist knew that s/he only wanted to get an advantage out of this situation.

After participants read this first part of the respective scenario, they were asked to rate the amount of anger they experienced, their perception of injustice, and their desire to take revenge on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 6. Verbal anchors differed depending on the wording of the item (e.g., "After this incident I felt angry," 1 = *not at all*, 6 = *very much*).

Revenge target manipulation

Next, participants were instructed to imagine that they took revenge—depending on experimental conditions—either against the original transgressor (*direct revenge* condition) or against a different target

(*displaced revenge* condition). Displaced targets (“Daniel” or “Daniela”) were introduced as members who belonged to the same group as the original transgressor (i.e., the same department within the company in the “working life” vignette; the same learning group as the transgressor in the “university” vignette). In the “working life” vignette, participants took revenge by passing on the target’s phone list to the accounting office for inspection, because they knew that the target had declared private calls as business calls in the past. Eventually, the whistleblowing resulted in an official warning from the HR department. In the “university” vignette, protagonists recognized that the target forgot her/his library card on a table after a lecture. Participants took revenge by giving it a little push so that it fell down from the table. When the target finally realized the missing library card, s/he got panicky.

Entitativity manipulation

The provocateurs (and the targets in the *displaced revenge* condition) belonged to a particular group, which was—depending on experimental conditions—described as either high or low in entitativity. Based on previous manipulations of entitativity (e.g., Crawford, Sherman, & Hamilton, 2002), high entitativity groups were described as highly cohesive, consisting of similar members that regularly interact and communicate with each other. In contrast, low entitativity groups were portrayed as loosely bound individuals who are not very similar to each other and do not interact or communicate very often. Descriptions were adapted to the particular context (“university” or “working life”). In the university vignette group members were described as fellow students of the transgressor (i.e., members of the same learning group), whereas in the working life vignette group members were described as colleagues working in the same department (i.e., the support department). For instance, participants in the *high entitativity* condition of the university vignette were told:

“Christian (or Christiane) joins a learning group together with Philipp, Anna, and Daniel (or Daniela). Members of this learning group know each other from their first semester. They really like each other and frequently spend their spare time together. They are similar to each other and talk about all different sort of things. When being asked, they would definitely call themselves ‘best friends.’”

In the *low entitativity* condition participants were told:

“Christian (or Christiane) joins a learning group together with Philipp, Anna, and Daniel (or Daniela). Members of this learning group got to know each other only recently via the university notice board. They do not know each other very well yet and they do not engage in any other joint activities. They are quite different and only meet to prepare for exams. When being asked, they would rather call their learning group a ‘partnership of convenience.’”

Dependent measures

Justice-related satisfaction was measured with four items. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they felt satisfied, content, relieved, and the degree to which justice had been restored on response scales ranging from 1 to 6 with verbal anchors differing on the wording of the item (e.g., “I think that justice has been restored,” 1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*). Together, these items formed a reliable scale (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .89$). Regret about revenge was measured with three items (“I wonder whether I should have reacted differently,” “I wish it all had turned out differently,” “Now I think I can focus on other things [reverse coded]”). These items formed a reliable scale (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .80$). Participants rated their agreement with each statement on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*).

Perceived entitativity

Participants were asked to indicate the level of perceived entitativity of the transgressor’s group. Besides two verbal items (“[The transgressor] and [target] are good friends,” “The group engages in joint activities”), we used a pictorial measure for group entitativity (see Rutchick et al., 2008). This item consisted of five pictures showing circles that differ with regard to their closeness to each other. Participants were asked to indicate which picture represents the described group best. Responses on these three items were z-standardized due to different scale ranges. Together, these items formed a reliable scale (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .86$).

Next, participants were asked to identify the provocateur and the target of revenge in the given scenario (e.g., “Who criticized you in a joint business meeting and was promoted afterwards: Christian/Daniel/I don’t know”), and to rate how easy vs. difficult it was for them to picture themselves in the described situation on a 5-point scale (1 = *very difficult* to 5 = *very easy*). Finally, participants were asked to provide demographic information and write comments about the experiment into an open text field.

Participants

One hundred and eighty-six participants completed the experiment. First, the data were inspected for implausible values and cases. Eleven cases (6%) were omitted because they did not indicate German as their native language. We supposed that insufficient language skills may cause comprehension problems and bias our results.² Next, we checked for cases with noticeably long or short completion times.³ Three univariate outliers (1.6%) with extreme long completion times (i.e., >3 standard deviations about the average completion time, ~33 min, $M_{\text{duration}} = 10$ min) were excluded from the sample. Data from two further respondents (1.1%) were excluded due to comments at the end of the study that revealed (a) problems in understanding the instructions properly or (b) problems in answering the given questions. Moreover, one participant (0.5%) had more than one third missing values on one of our dependent variables and was therefore excluded. Thus, our final sample comprised 169 participants (34% female). Ages ranged between 18 and 56 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 28.80$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 8.51$).

Results and discussion

Preliminary analyses

Ninety percent of the participants ($n = 152$) correctly identified the provocateur in the respective scenario. In the *direct revenge* condition 83% ($n = 75$) of the participants correctly indicated that the provocateur was the target, while in the *displaced revenge* condition 85% ($n = 67$) correctly identified that another person was the target of the revenge reaction. A 2 (entitativity: low vs. high) \times 2 (revenge: direct vs. displaced) ANOVA on perceived entitativity confirmed that participants in the high entitativity condition perceived the group to be more entity-like ($M = 0.72$, $SD = 0.54$) than those in the low entitativity condition ($M = -0.77$, $SD = 0.40$), $F(1,166) = 416.30$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .72$. Neither the main effect of revenge ($p = .16$) nor the entitativity \times revenge interaction effect was significant ($p = .58$), indicating that the effect of entitativity was equal in both revenge conditions.

² The language exclusion criterion was applied in Study 1, since this vignette study was very text heavy and the sample – compared to the student samples in Studies 2 and 3 – was heterogeneous (with regard to educational background etc.). In addition, participants in Study 1 were probably less experienced with completing online surveys. Therefore, chances that non-native speakers may have experienced difficulties in following the instructions and understanding the manipulations properly may be higher compared to psychology student samples that are typically used to such studies.

³ The completion time exclusion criterion was applied in both online experiments (Studies 1 and 2) to (a) ensure that manipulations worked properly and (b) to improve data quality. Long completion times in online experiments usually indicate that respondents were interrupted or concerned with something else while completing the questionnaire and, for example, did not properly attend to the instructions (see Malhotra, 2008).

Participants had no difficulties picturing themselves as protagonists in each scenario, and the two scenarios did not differ in the degree to which participants could picture themselves in each of them (working life scenario: $M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.81$; university scenario: $M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.90$), $t(167) = 0.35$, $p = .73$. Moreover, the respective provocation was considered equally unjust (working life: $M = 5.30$, university: $M = 4.98$) and equally likely to elicit vengeful desires (working life: $M = 3.83$, university: $M = 3.61$), $t_s \leq 1.93$, $p_s \geq .05$. However, participants in the “working life” vignette felt more anger ($M = 5.10$) than participants in the “university” vignette ($M = 4.62$), $t(167) = 3.00$, $p < .01$. Critically, vignette type did not moderate any of the effects we will describe in the following; therefore, anger was not used as a covariate in the subsequent analyses.

Main analysis

First, to test whether participants experience more satisfaction after displaced revenge, when the transgressor group was manipulated to be highly entitative, we calculated a 2 (entitativity) \times 2 (revenge) ANOVA with justice-related satisfaction as the dependent variable. Results reveal a main effect of revenge: Participants who imagined taking direct revenge reported more satisfaction ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.24$) than participants who imagined taking displaced revenge ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.37$), $F(1,165) = 11.40$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$. As expected, no main effect for entitativity was found, $F(1,165) = 1.91$, $p = .17$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. However, contrary to our assumptions, the entitativity \times revenge interaction was not significant, $F(1,165) = 0.06$, $p = .80$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$. Next, we entered regret into a 2 (entitativity) \times 2 (revenge) ANOVA. Results revealed a significant main effect of revenge: Participants who imagined taking direct revenge felt less regret ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.27$) than people in the displaced revenge condition ($M = 4.70$, $SD = 1.23$), $F(1,165) = 11.75$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$. As expected, no main effect for entitativity appeared, $F(1,165) = 0.48$, $p = .49$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$. Importantly, we found a significant entitativity \times revenge interaction effect, $F(1,165) = 4.85$, $p = .03$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$ (see Fig. 1). The analysis of simple effects using Sidak adjustment revealed that participants who took displaced revenge reported lower levels of regret in the high entitativity ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.40$) than those in the low entitativity condition ($M = 4.98$, $SD = 0.81$), $F(1,165) = 3.95$, $p = .049$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Among participants who took direct revenge, no entitativity effect was found ($p = .27$). Looking at the results differently, we found that in the high entitativity group, regret did not differ between displaced ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.50$) and direct revenge ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.08$), $F(1,165) = 0.77$, $p = .38$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, whereas when entitativity was low, displaced avengers experienced more regret ($M = 4.98$, $SD = 0.81$) than direct avengers ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.45$), $F(1,165) = 15.43$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$.⁴

To summarize, the results from Study 1 show that taking displaced revenge against an uninvolvement target alleviates negative feelings, such as regret, when the group to which transgressor and target belong was described as high in entitativity. However, contrary to our hypothesis, taking displaced revenge against a high- (vs. low-) entitativity group did not lead to more justice-related satisfaction. One might argue that our hypothetical vignettes were too weak to elicit strong vengeful desires (the average score on vengeful desires was 3.72 on a scale from 1 to 6), and, accordingly, strong feelings of justice-related satisfaction (on average, 2.65 on a scale from 1 to 6). Study 2 was designed

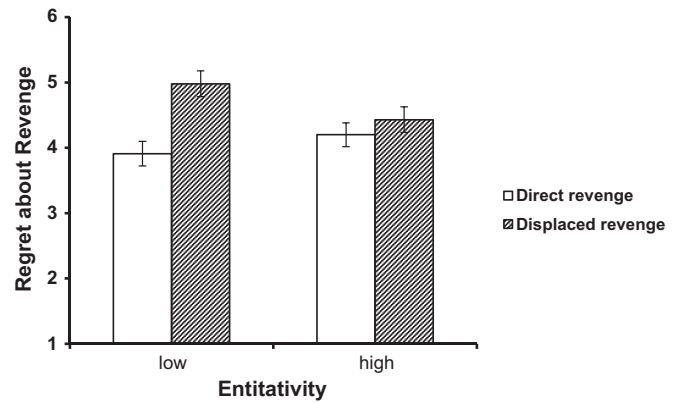


Fig. 1. Mean values on regret about revenge by experimental conditions (Study 1). Vertical lines denote ± 1 standard error of means.

to test the same hypothesis, but to increase the personal relevance of the initial provocation incident. Instead of confronting participants with hypothetical vignettes, we used a technique in which participants were asked to recall a situation in which they had actually been victimized. As in Study 1, we hypothesized that displaced revenge can taste “sweet” when the group to which the target and the original perpetrator belong is perceived as highly (vs. low) entitative.

Study 2

In Study 2, we used an experimentally manipulated retrospective reports paradigm (for similar approaches, see Okimoto, Wenzel, & Hedrick, 2013; Okimoto, Wenzel, & Feather, 2011; Stenstrom et al., 2008): Participants were instructed to recall a particular event from their own experience in which they were personally harmed and hence felt the desire to take revenge. Building on the reported event, we provided them with additional (counterfactual) background information, asking them to imagine taking *direct* revenge against the original transgressor or *displaced* revenge against a third person. Compared to Study 1, this paradigm has the advantage of building upon participants' personal experience about an event eliciting a desire for revenge.

Method

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to experimental conditions in a 2 (entitativity: low vs. high) \times 2 (revenge: direct vs. displaced) between-subjects design. Upon entering the study, they were asked to recall a personal experience from the past in which they were angered and consequently felt the desire to take revenge but actually did not do so. They were provided with several guiding questions and asked to write about this particular event (e.g., “When did this incident happen?”, “How serious was the situation?”). Furthermore, participants were prompted to report the name or a pseudonym for the transgressor, which was automatically pasted into all subsequent texts. After describing the provocative act, participants were asked to indicate how angry they felt after this situation happened (1 = *not at all*, 6 = *very much*), and whether they wanted to take revenge (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*).

Entitativity manipulation

Next, they were asked to imagine that the transgressor in the given situation was a member of a group that was either described as high or low in entitativity. Participants in the *high entitativity* condition were told:

“[The transgressor] joins a group together with Philipp, Anna, David, Sarah, and Alex. The members of this group have known each other

⁴ When non-native speakers and participants who exceeded the 3-SD completion time criterion were included in the analyses ($N = 183$), the main effect of revenge remained significant for satisfaction scores, $F(1,179) = 13.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$. None of the other effects were significant, $F_s \leq 2.16$, $p_s \geq .14$. For regret scores, the entitativity \times revenge interaction effect remains marginally significant, $F(1,179) = 2.99$, $p = .086$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Participants in the displaced revenge/high entitativity condition ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.47$) experienced less regret than people in the displaced revenge/low entitativity condition ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 1.00$). However, this conditional effect was not significant, $F(1,179) = 2.33$, $p = .13$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. These results may suggest that excluding those participants reduces error variance and increases the power to detect the proposed interaction effect.

for a long time. They really like each other and consider themselves 'close friends.' They frequently meet and communicate via telephone and internet on a daily basis. Taken together, there is a strong cohesion between members of this group."

Participants in the low entitativity condition were told:

"[The transgressor] joins a group together with Philipp, Anna, David, Sarah, and Alex. Members of this group have not known each other for a long time. They like each other, but would not consider themselves 'friends.' They rarely meet each other and sometimes communicate via telephone or internet. Taken together, there is a rather loose cohesion between members of this group."

Revenge manipulation

Next, depending on experimental conditions, participants were asked to imagine and write about taking revenge either against the initial transgressor or against another member of her/his group ("Alex"). This name was chosen because it is gender-neutral. In the direct revenge condition, participants were instructed to imagine taking revenge against the original transgressor. In the displaced revenge condition, participants received the following prompt:

"Now please imagine that you do not have the chance to meet [the transgressor] again to take revenge. Instead you take revenge against Alex, a member of the same group."

Afterwards, participants had the opportunity to describe their vengeful reaction in detail, and to rate it with regard to how severe it was, how angry the target probably felt after revenge was taken on him or her (1 = *not at all*, 6 = *very much*), and how much harm this vengeful action had caused (1 = *little*, 6 = *a lot*).

Dependent measures

Justice-related satisfaction (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$) and regret about revenge (Cronbach's $\alpha = .61$) were measured with the same items as in Study 1. Again, response scales ranged from 1 to 6 with higher numbers indicating more satisfaction or regret.

Perceived entitativity

Next, participants were asked to rate the extent to which they perceived the transgressor's group as entitative on three items. Besides a two-item verbal measure ("[The transgressor] and Alex are good friends," "The group engages in joint activities"), we used the same pictorial measure as in Study 1. Items were z-standardized due to different scale ranges. All three items formed a reliable scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$).

On the last page of the survey, participants were asked to provide demographic data. With one control item, we assessed whether participants were able to immerse themselves into the described situation ("How difficult vs. easy was it for you to put yourself in the described situation?" 1 = *very difficult*, 5 = *very easy*). Finally, participants were asked to write comments about the experiment in an open text field.

Participants

Participants were 105 undergraduate students who volunteered for extra course credit or, alternatively, could take part in a lottery. Five participants (5%) were excluded because they reported no desire to take revenge after the provocation (i.e., indicated "strongly disagree" when asked whether they wanted to take revenge after the incident; see above) and thus did not meet an important criterion for this study. Furthermore, ten participants (10%) were excluded due to open comments at the end of the study that suggested (a) that they could not imagine themselves taking revenge, (b) that they did not understand the instructions, or (c) that they had problems with the given task

(e.g., reported openly that they could not really picture themselves in the situation). One further participant (1%) was excluded due to an extremely long completion time (i.e., >3 standard deviations above the average completion time, ~226 min, $M_{\text{duration}} = 40$ min). Altogether, data from 16 participants were excluded. Thus, our final sample comprised 89 participants (73% female). Participants' ages ranged between 19 and 36 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 22.02$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 2.86$).

Results and discussion

Preliminary analyses

Self-reported anger and desires to take revenge as a consequence of the recalled provocation were high among participants (anger: $M = 5.34$, $SD = 0.93$; vengeful desires: $M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.30$). Self-reported anger was higher in the direct revenge condition ($M = 5.68$, $SD = 0.52$) than in the displaced revenge condition ($M = 4.95$, $SD = 1.13$), $F(1,85) = 15.88$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .16$, but only marginally related to satisfaction scores ($r = .21$, $p = .06$) and not related to regret scores ($r = -.15$, $p = .15$). Vengeful desires did not differ as a function of any of the two independent variables ($ps \geq .31$).

Direct and displaced revenge reactions differed with regard to how much harm the vengeful reaction caused (harmfulness rating: $M_{\text{direct}} = 3.30$, $M_{\text{displaced}} = 2.51$), $F(1,83) = 5.83$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$, and how angry it made the target (angriness rating: $M_{\text{direct}} = 4.54$, $M_{\text{displaced}} = 3.41$), $F(1,83) = 13.15$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$. No difference was found concerning the severity of vengeful reactions ($M_{\text{direct}} = 3.65$, $M_{\text{displaced}} = 3.22$), $F(1,83) = 2.19$, $p = .14$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Moreover, for those three variables neither the entitativity main effects nor the entitativity \times revenge interaction effects were significant, $F_s < 1$, $ps \geq .47$. Importantly, harmfulness ratings ($r = .27$, $p = .01$) and anger ratings ($r = .19$, $p = .07$) were positively related to satisfaction scores, but not to regret scores ($rs \leq .12$, $ps \geq .29$). Thus, we decided to include both harmfulness and anger ratings as covariates in the subsequent analyses except in our analysis of regret scores.⁵

Finally, the extent to which participants could imagine themselves in the respective situation ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.89$) did not differ as a function of entitativity, revenge target, or the interaction of the two, $F_s \leq 1.44$, $ps \geq .23$.

Perceived entitativity manipulation check

A 2 (entitativity: low vs. high) \times 2 (revenge: direct vs. displaced) ANCOVA with harmfulness (of the vengeful reaction, see above) and anger (felt by the revenge target, see above) ratings as covariates confirmed our manipulation of group entitativity, $F(1,81) = 13.57$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$: participants in the high entitativity condition perceived the group to be more entity-like ($M_{\text{adj}} = 0.34$, $M = 0.35$, $SD = 0.89$) than those in the low entitativity condition ($M_{\text{adj}} = -.030$, $M = -.031$, $SD = 0.69$). Neither the main effect of revenge nor the entitativity \times revenge interaction effect was significant, $F_s < 1$, $ps \geq .90$.

Main analyses

A 2 (entitativity) \times 2 (revenge) ANCOVA with harmfulness (of the vengeful reaction) and anger (felt by the revenge target) ratings as covariates revealed a significant main effect of revenge, such that participants imagining taking direct revenge felt more satisfaction ($M_{\text{adj}} = 3.64$, $M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.16$) than people in the displaced revenge condition ($M_{\text{adj}} = 2.78$, $M = 2.72$, $SD = 1.22$), $F(1,81) = 9.97$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$. No main effect for entitativity appeared ($p = .35$). More importantly and in line with our hypothesis, we found a

⁵ When the covariates were not included, the pattern of results was essentially the same. The entitativity \times revenge interaction effect, $F(1,85) = 3.80$, $p = .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, as well as the crucial conditional effect, $F(1,85) = 4.23$, $p = .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, remained significant as expected. In the high entitativity condition no difference between displaced and direct revenge was found, $F(1,85) = 1.28$, $p = .26$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$.

significant entitativity \times revenge interaction effect, $F(1,81) = 4.47, p = .04, \eta_p^2 = .05$ (see Fig. 2). Simple main effects analyses using Sidak adjustment revealed that participants who took displaced revenge reported significantly higher levels of satisfaction in the high entitativity ($M_{adj} = 3.17, M = 3.11, SD = 1.09$) compared to the low entitativity condition ($M_{adj} = 2.40, M = 2.36, SD = 1.25$), $F(1,81) = 4.40, p = .04, \eta^2 = .05$. By contrast, entitativity did not significantly influence satisfaction in the direct revenge condition, $F(1,81) = 0.73, p = .40, \eta^2 = .01$. Looking at the results differently, we found that in the high entitativity condition, satisfaction did not differ between displaced ($M_{adj} = 3.17$) and direct revenge ($M_{adj} = 3.49, M = 3.52, SD = 1.21$), $F(1,81) = 0.73, p = .40, \eta^2 = .01$, whereas when entitativity was low, direct avengers experienced more satisfaction ($M_{adj} = 3.78, M = 3.75, SD = 1.12$) than displaced avengers ($M_{adj} = 2.40$), $F(1,81) = 14.87, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16$.⁶ Next, we entered the regret index into a 2 (entitativity) \times 2 (revenge) ANOVA. However, neither the main effects nor the interaction effect was significant $F_s \leq 1.83, p_s \geq .18$.⁷

Taken together, Study 2 shows that taking displaced revenge can increase justice-related satisfaction among avengers when the initial transgressor and the later target belong to a highly entitative (vs. a low entitative) group. Notably, we found the hypothesized justice-related satisfaction effect in Study 2, but not in Study 1. Conversely, we found an entitativity \times revenge interaction effect on regret in Study 1, but not in Study 2. We will come back to this point in the [General Discussion](#) section. As noted above, Study 2 built on a real experience of victimization and provided participants with the possibility to choose their vengeful action for themselves. Nevertheless, it required participants to recall and imagine a vengeful situation as vividly as possible.

Study 3

In Studies 1 and 2 participants were asked to imagine or recall a situation in which they were provoked or harmed by a specific perpetrator and had the opportunity to take revenge either against the same perpetrator (i.e., direct revenge) or against a different, uninvolved target (i.e., displaced revenge). Both studies rely on participants' willingness and capability to imagine these situations as vividly as possible, and asking participants afterwards to what extent they felt regretful or satisfied requires that people can validly experience these emotions after imagining taking revenge. Importantly, research on affective forecasting suggests that people sometimes tend to overestimate the extent to which their (vengeful) actions have hedonic benefits (Carlsmith et al., 2008, but see Funk et al., 2014, Study 1). Thus, we decided to replicate our results in a third study in which participants actually took revenge in a standardized situation. Afterwards, we measured to what extent they experienced justice-related satisfaction and feelings of regret.

Apart from the fact that Study 3 was conducted in the lab, it was also designed to investigate how different facets of entitativity contribute to the feeling of satisfaction gained from displaced revenge. We manipulated (1) the degree of (superficial) similarity and (2) the degree of interconnectedness (or mutual interaction) between group members orthogonally. This design allowed us to investigate whether similarity,

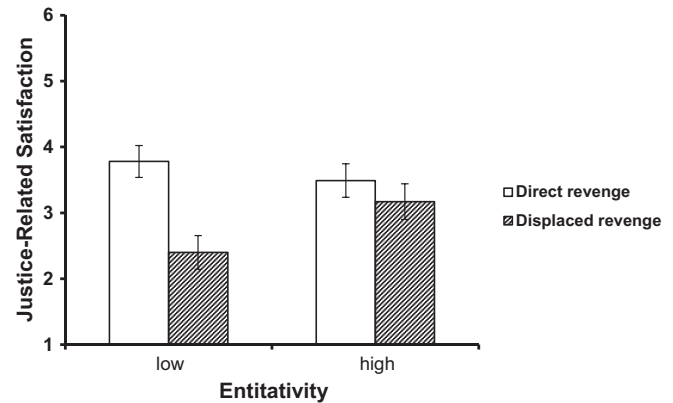


Fig. 2. Mean values on justice-related satisfaction by experimental conditions (Study 2). Vertical lines denote ± 1 standard error of means. Mean values are adjusted for harmfulness and angeriness ratings.

interconnectedness, or both are necessary and/or sufficient to make displaced revenge satisfying for the avenger. In the following we use the label *similarity* to refer to the superficial similarity of group members and the label *interconnectedness* to refer to the degree of interconnectedness and mutual interaction among group members.

Method

Personality measures

Prior to the laboratory experiment we collected data from a convenience sample of students who completed different justice-related trait scales that were part of a questionnaire administered in a university lecture. This was done to account for systematic inter-individual differences between avengers and non-avengers. The measures included justice sensitivity from (1) the observer's, (2) the victim's, and (3) the beneficiary's perspective (Schmitt, Gollwitzer, Maes, & Arbach, 2005), and (4) attitudes toward revenge (Stuckless & Goranson, 1992). Altogether, 73 students from this sample later took part in the actual experiment.

Procedure

Participants came into the lab believing that they would participate in an experiment entitled "Emotional change and reading comprehension in cooperation situations." After participants were provided with an overview of the experiment and a set of general instructions, informed consent was obtained. Next, the experimenter explained that the first part of the experiment was about impression formation of individuals and groups. Participants were escorted to a second cubicle equipped with a computer screen on which they watched an ostensibly live video transmission from a second laboratory room. This transmission showed three students who were introduced as participants in another experiment (1 man, 2 women). The ostensible video transmission consisted of a pre-recorded clip that was created in order to manipulate similarity and interconnectedness among those individuals who would later serve as targets of retaliation. To further strengthen the credibility of the "live cam," video clips were embedded in the interface of a well-known and commercially available VoIP program. Scripts including detailed descriptions were written for each condition beforehand to ensure comparability of the video material. After 2 min the transmission ended and participants were escorted back to their cubicle.

Interconnectedness and similarity manipulation

In the *strong interconnectedness* condition, the ostensible participants frequently turned toward each other while talking. From their conversation participants learned that they were all members of the same sports team and engaged in several joint activities. The content of their conversation was designed to create the impression that they

⁶ Using self-reported angeriness as an additional covariate did not change the pattern of results. The entitativity \times revenge interaction effect was still significant for satisfaction scores ($F(1,80) = 4.53, p = .04, \eta_p^2 = .05$), as was the crucial conditional effect ($F(1,80) = 4.36, p = .04, \eta^2 = .05$). Again, displaced and direct avengers did not differ in the high entitativity condition ($F(1,80) = .38, p = .54, \eta^2 = .01$).

⁷ After including participants who exceeded the 3-SD completion time criterion or reported problems or expressed doubts ($N = 100$), the entitativity \times revenge interaction effect was no longer significant, $F(1,92) = 2.30, p = .13, \eta_p^2 = .02$. However, participants in the displaced revenge/high entitativity condition ($M_{adj} = 3.07, M = 3.05, SD = 1.07$) experienced slightly more satisfaction than people in the displaced revenge/low entitativity condition ($M_{adj} = 2.50, M = 2.47, SD = 1.25$). This conditional effect was only marginally significant ($p = .095, \eta^2 = .03$). Note that the difference in degrees of freedom is due to missing values on the covariates. Regarding regret scores, the pattern of result does not change: none of the effects reached significance, $F_s \leq 2.50, p_s \geq .12$.

knew each other well and that they communicated and interacted on a regular basis. In the *weak interconnectedness* condition, the three ostensible participants entered the room one after the other. For quite some time, they sat next to each other without talking. A conversation between the participants started off rather slowly. From their conversation, it became clear that the participants did not know each other well, and that they did not share many interests or characteristics. The situation was designed to create the impression that these three individuals did not form an interactive or interconnected group.

Superficial similarity was manipulated via clothing. In the *high similarity* condition, all three ostensible participants wore red colored shirts with the imprint “Group A,” whereas in the *low similarity* condition, participants were dressed in very different clothes without reference to a common group. Fig. 3 shows snapshots of the video material.

Entitativity manipulation check

Following the transmission participants were asked to answer several questions concerning the ostensible participants in the other room (“How frequently do members of the group in Laboratory Room 2 interact with each other?” 1 = *very rarely*, 6 = *very frequently*; “How similar are the participants in the other room?” 1 = *not very similar*, 6 = *very similar*). Perceived entitativity was measured with three verbal items (e.g., “When you think about the participants in the other room, do you think about them as...,” 1 = *a number of individuals*, 6 = *a whole*) and the pictorial measure from Studies 1 and 2 (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$). Again, scores were z-standardized due to different response scales. Item wordings were adapted and slightly modified for the present context from Rutchick et al. (2008).

Provocation

Next, participants were informed that they would now play a game together with one of the participants from the other room. They were asked to solve as many anagrams as possible in 1 min. For each anagram correctly solved during this time both players earned two raffle tickets

toward a 50€ (approx. 68 US-\$) gift card for a restaurant. They were informed that the winner would be drawn directly after the game. Participants solved 6.51 anagrams on average. The number of solved anagrams of participants' ostensible partners was programmed to be roughly equal to the number of anagrams solved by themselves. Both players were asked to make a recommendation for distributing the raffle tickets between them. The final distribution was obtained by averaging the two recommendations. On average, participants recommended an equal split ($M = 54\%$ for their partner, $SD = 11\%$). The ostensible partner, however, always recommended 90% for him- or herself. Moreover, s/he was drawn as the winner of the gift certificate. This paradigm has been successfully used in prior research on vengeful reactions (e.g., Funk et al., 2014; Gollwitzer et al., 2011). After the lottery, participants were asked to rate their current mood; these items included outrage-related emotions such as anger, fury, and dissatisfaction (1 = *not at all*, 6 = *very much*; 3 items; Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$). Furthermore, participants were asked to rate their partner's fairness (“The behavior of my partner was fair;” 1 = *not at all*, 6 = *very much*).

Displaced revenge option

Following the anagram task, participants were given the opportunity to take revenge against another participant from the other laboratory room. Participants were told that the target would have to look at nine unpleasant images which were taken from the International Affective Picture System (IAPS; Lang, Bradley, & Cuthbert, 2008) and to create a description for each of the images. The task was described as very unpleasant. Additionally, participants were provided with a preview of the pictures. Participants were asked to decide whether or not the target would have to complete this unpleasant task (see Gollwitzer & Denzler, 2009, for the same paradigm). Eighty-five participants (58%) voted “yes.” Since we were interested in affective reactions after taking displaced revenge, only the data from these 85 avengers will be analyzed. Importantly, avengers were fairly evenly distributed across the four experimental conditions, $\chi^2(1, 85) = 0.10, p = .75$. More precisely,

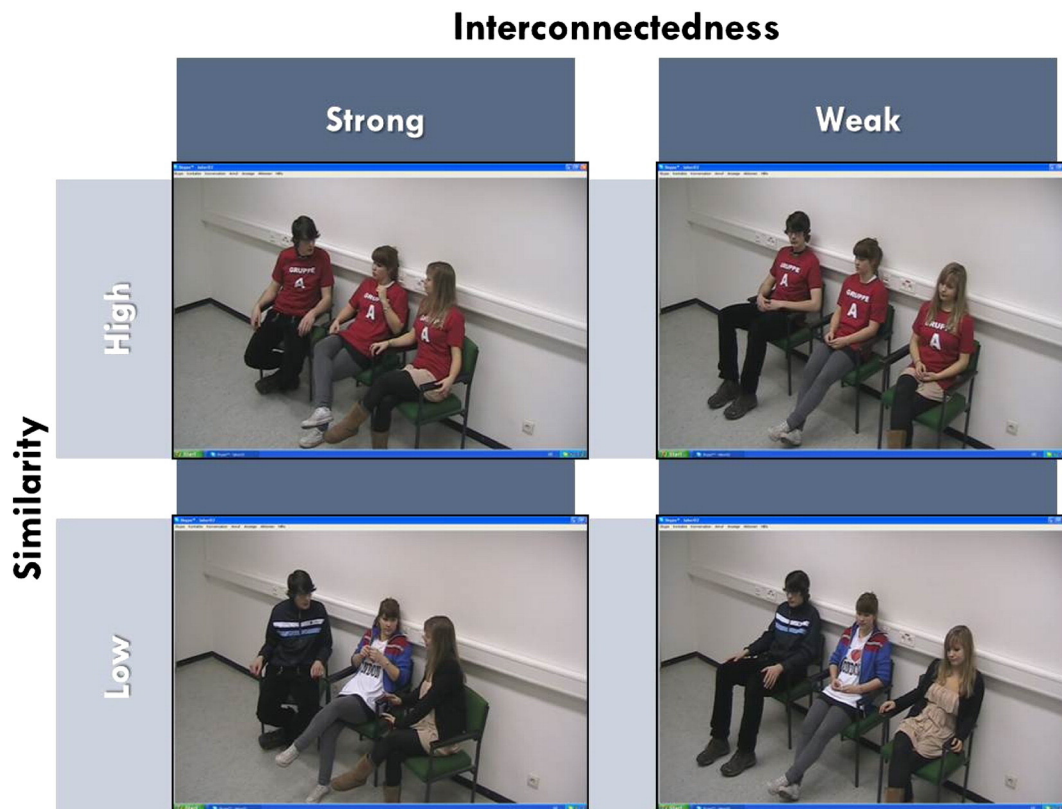


Fig. 3. Snapshot from the video material used in Study 3 to manipulate similarity and interconnectedness independently.

participants' distribution is as follows: low similarity/weak interconnectedness, $n = 24$, low similarity/strong interconnectedness, $n = 19$, high similarity/weak interconnectedness, $n = 22$, and high similarity/strong interconnectedness, $n = 20$.

Dependent measures

Justice-related satisfaction was measured with four items (cf. Gollwitzer et al., 2011) that focused on cognitive aspects of justice achieved and psychological closure ("Now I experience a sense of closure," "Everyone got what they deserved," "Everything turned out to be satisfactory for me," "Justice has been restored;" Cronbach's $\alpha = .62$). Regret about revenge was assessed with the same 3-item scale that was used in Studies 1 and 2. Unfortunately, the internal consistency of this scale turned out to be very low (Cronbach's $\alpha = .50$). Ratings for both scales were made on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*).

Participants

One hundred and forty-six students agreed to take part in the experiment and 85 decided to take revenge (see above). Thirteen cases (15%) had to be omitted from further analyses because they either doubted the existence of the other participants or correctly guessed that this study was designed to investigate vengeful responses. The final sample consisted of 72 participants (75% female). Ages ranged from 18 to 30 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 21.26$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 2.91$).

Results and discussion

Preliminary analyses

First, we analyzed participants' self-reported anger following the lottery. On average, anger scores were relatively low ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.20$), which is a typical finding in laboratory settings (e.g., Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989). No difference was found between avengers and non-avengers regarding the amount of anger reported after the provocation, $t(130) = 0.05$, $p = .96$. Moreover, participants rather disagreed with the statement that the behavior of their partner was fair ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.45$; on a 6-point scale). Finally, we checked whether avengers ($n = 38$) differed from non-avengers ($n = 35$) with regard to the personality traits assessed prior to the laboratory experiment. In line with previous research (Gollwitzer et al., 2011), we did not find any differences between avengers and non-avengers on justice-related personality traits ($ps \geq .38$).

Entitativity manipulation check

In order to test whether our experimental manipulation of entitativity was successful in manipulating similarity and interconnectedness between the members of the target group as intended, we analyzed participants' ratings of perceived similarity and interconnectedness as manipulation check criteria (see Table 1). A 2 (similarity: low vs. high) \times 2 (interconnectedness: weak vs. strong) ANOVA on participants' perceived interconnectedness ratings revealed that participants perceived the other group to be more interconnected in the strong interconnectedness condition ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.08$) than in the weak interconnectedness condition ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.18$), $F(1,68) = 51.32$,

$p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .43$. No other effects were significant ($ps \geq .42$). An ANOVA on participants' perceived similarity ratings revealed no main effect of our similarity manipulation ($M_{\text{high similarity}} = 3.31$, $M_{\text{low similarity}} = 2.81$), $F(1,68) = 2.83$, $p = .10$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. However, we found a significant interaction effect, $F(1,68) = 7.18$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$. Follow-up simple effects analyses using Sidak adjustment revealed that participants in the weak interconnectedness condition perceived the other group as more similar in the high similarity condition ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.45$) than in the low similarity condition ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.05$), $F(1,68) = 9.47$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$. In the strong interconnectedness condition no difference was found, $F(1,68) = 0.50$, $p = .48$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. Thus, perceived similarity ratings were affected by the similarity manipulation in absence of strong interconnectedness, whereas perceived interconnectedness ratings were solely affected by the interconnectedness (but not the similarity) manipulation.

Finally, we calculated a 2 (similarity) \times 2 (interconnectedness) ANOVA on the perceived entitativity index. The main effect of interconnectedness was significant, $F(1,68) = 33.02$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .33$, whereas the main effect of similarity ($p = .45$) and the interaction effect ($p = .71$) were not. More precisely, perceived entitativity ratings were higher in the strong interconnectedness condition ($M = 0.47$, $SD = 0.77$) than in the weak interconnectedness condition ($M = -0.47$, $SD = 0.60$). Taken together, these results suggest that the perception of entitativity was primarily inferred from interconnectedness between participants (compared to superficial similarity). To shed more light on the relationship between perceptions of interconnectedness and similarity, we calculated a multiple regression analysis with perceived entitativity as criterion and perceived interconnectedness and similarity as predictors. Interestingly, both perceptions of similarity, $B = .12$, $SE = .06$, $t(71) = 1.99$, $p = .05$, and interconnectedness, $B = .32$, $SE = .05$, $t(71) = 6.32$, $p < .001$, were significant predictors of perceived entitativity.

Main analyses

A 2 (similarity) \times 2 (interconnectedness) ANOVA on satisfaction ratings yielded a significant main effect of the similarity manipulation, $F(1,68) = 7.09$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$ (see Fig. 4): Participants in the high similarity condition experienced more satisfaction after taking displaced revenge ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 0.96$) than those in the low similarity condition ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 0.62$). However, the similarity main effect was qualified by a significant similarity \times interconnectedness interaction, $F(1,68) = 4.66$, $p = .03$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. Simple effects analyses using Sidak adjustment revealed that participants in the strong interconnectedness condition experienced more satisfaction in the high similarity condition ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.07$) compared to the low similarity condition ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 0.65$), $F(1,68) = 11.68$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .15$. No difference was found in the weak interconnectedness condition, $F(1,68) = 0.13$, $p = .72$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$. Moreover, participants in the high similarity condition experienced more satisfaction in the strong interconnectedness condition ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.07$) compared to the weak interconnectedness condition ($M = 2.84$, $SD = .73$), $F(1,68) = 4.07$, $p = .048$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, whereas no difference was found in the low similarity condition, $F(1,68) = 1.04$, $p = .31$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. The main effect for interconnectedness was not significant ($p = .47$). Finally, we entered the regret

Table 1

Manipulation check for Study 3: Effect of interconnectedness and similarity manipulations on interconnectedness and similarity ratings.

Dependent variable	Similarity manipulation	Interconnectedness manipulation		Mean (SD)
		Weak interconnectedness	Strong interconnectedness	
Perceived interconnectedness ratings	Low similarity	2.50 (1.28)	4.59 (0.80)	3.46 (1.50)
	High similarity	2.44 (1.09)	4.21 (1.27)	3.40 (1.48)
	Mean (SD)	2.47 (1.84)	4.39 (1.08)	
Perceived similarity ratings	Low similarity	2.40 (1.05)	3.29 (1.45)	2.81 (1.27)
	High similarity	3.69 (1.45)	3.00 (1.15)	3.31 (1.32)
	Mean (SD)	2.97 (1.38)	3.14 (1.25)	

Note. Means and standard deviations (in parentheses). Response scales range from 1 to 6.

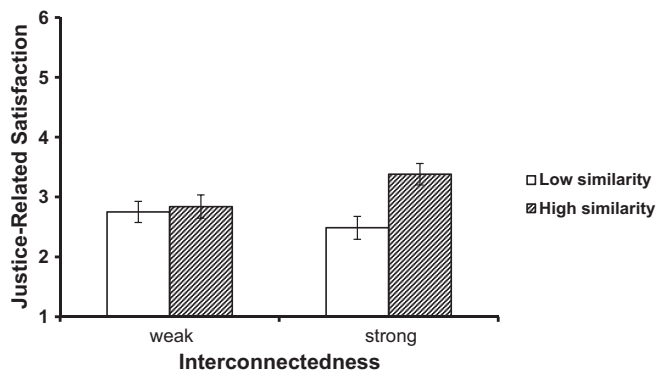


Fig. 4. Mean values on justice-related satisfaction by experimental conditions (Study 3). Vertical lines denote ± 1 standard error of means.

index into a 2 (similarity) \times 2 (interconnectedness) ANOVA. As in Study 2, no effects were significant, $F_s \leq 0.53$, $p_s \geq .47$.

Taken together, the results from Study 3 highlight the importance of both strong interconnectedness and high similarity between the original transgressor and the displaced target. People experienced the most satisfaction when the transgressor group was perceived to be strongly interconnected and, at the same time, similar in appearance. As in Study 2, no effects were found on feelings of regret. However, this may be due to the poor reliability of the regret scale in this study.

In contrast to Studies 1 and 2, the strength of Study 3 is that participants were free to decide whether they wanted to take revenge or not, and that participants actually took revenge (instead of merely imagining doing so). This freedom to take revenge, however, led to a large reduction in our sample size. Interestingly, while perceptions of similarity and interconnectedness were both related to overall entitativity ratings, these ratings only responded to the interconnectedness, but not the similarity manipulation. In this context, it should be emphasized that entitativity is a multi-dimensional construct. As a consequence, no clear consensus has been reached so far on how it can be best manipulated and measured (see Hamilton, 2007). We attempted to capture entitativity perceptions as broadly as possible, but our measure was possibly not sensitive enough to detect changes of mere superficial similarity. In addition, and consistent with previous findings, our results corroborate the notion that mutual interaction (or interconnectedness) is the primary predictor of entitativity (e.g., Gaertner, Iuzzini, Witt, & Orifla, 2006; Lickel et al., 2000).

Internal meta-analysis

Findings are not totally consistent across the three studies reported in this article. In particular, the proposed effect on justice-related satisfaction was significant in Studies 2 and 3, but not in Study 1. Conversely, the proposed effect on regret was significant in Study 1, but not in Studies 2 and 3. In order to test the robustness of our findings, we conducted an internal meta-analysis across the present set of studies (cf. Giner-Sorolla, 2012). More precisely, we conducted a fixed effects meta-analysis (see Borenstein, Hedges, Higgins, & Rothstein, 2010) to determine the robustness of the effect of our entitativity manipulations on avengers' satisfaction and regret after displaced revenge. For this purpose, we calculated Cohen's d for each study, separately. In Studies 1 and 2 we used the crucial comparison between low and high entitativity in the displaced revenge conditions, whereas in Study 3 we used the test of our high similarity/strong interconnectedness condition against the remaining three conditions. Across all three studies, we obtained an effect size of $d = 0.51$, 95% CI [0.21, 0.82] with homogenous effects ($Q = 2.92$, $p = .23$) for justice-related satisfaction. The overall effect on justice-related satisfaction still remains significant if the full samples of Studies 1 and 2 are used (i.e., without excluding participants due to processing time, language skills, etc.) and without controlling for

covariates in Study 2, $d = 0.44$, 95% CI [0.15, 0.72]. By contrast, the effect on feelings of regret was not significant, $d = -0.18$, 95% CI [-0.47, 0.11]. These findings speak to the robustness of the reported effect of entitativity on justice-related satisfaction following revenge at a displaced target of a highly entitative group.

General discussion

The present article reports three studies illuminating the conditions under which revenge targeted at a different person than the original transgressor (i.e., displaced revenge) has hedonic benefits for avengers. More precisely, we tested the hypothesis that displaced revenge can be "sweet" for the avenger when the transgressor and the target of one's revenge both belong to a highly entitative group. Across three studies this hypothesis received support for justice-related satisfaction but not for feelings of regret. Avengers experienced greater satisfaction after taking displaced revenge when the transgressor's group was high (vs. low) in entitativity. Interestingly, when the group was highly entitative, there was no difference between direct and displaced revenge in Study 2. These results show that revenge that is directed against seemingly innocent third-party targets can actually have hedonic benefits and achieve a state of re-established justice in the eyes of victims. This notion is further corroborated by an internal meta-analysis, which demonstrates the robustness of this effect across our three studies.

Apart from the fact that we were interested in the hedonic benefits of displaced revenge, the present research expands the previous literature on displaced revenge in several important ways. First, in the present set of studies, participants were personally victimized and either should imagine taking revenge (Studies 1 and 2) or actually took revenge (Study 3). In contrast, participants in prior research were not personally involved as victims or avengers, but rather took a third-party perspective (e.g., Newheiser et al., 2012).

Second, we go beyond previous conceptualizations of displaced revenge as a form of collective punishment (e.g., Gaertner et al., 2008; Stenstrom et al., 2008). Importantly, collective sanctions always included the actual transgressor whereas in our research the actual transgressor did not receive any punishment. In all three studies revenge was solely directed at individual targets that were completely uninvolved in the original transgression.

Third, the present research further illuminates the features of entitativity that lead to satisfaction in the aftermath of displaced revenge by manipulating superficial similarity and interconnectedness between members of the transgressor's group orthogonally in Study 3. Both facets are strongly related to peoples' perception of entitativity (Ip et al., 2006). However, the question of how those facets exactly relate to displaced revenge has still not been clarified. Our results point at the important role of both similarity and interconnectedness between group members: avengers experienced more satisfaction and justice when the members of the transgressor group were manipulated to be strongly interconnected and similar in their appearance.

Limitations and directions for future research

Results of our meta-analysis underscore the assumption that displaced revenge can be satisfying and lead to a sense of re-established justice. Interestingly, this effect appears to be specific to satisfaction as we failed to find consistent evidence regarding feelings of regret in our experiments. At a first glance, this seems puzzling as one may assume that an increase in positive outcomes comes along with a decrease of negative feelings. However, since revenge reactions ultimately aim at re-establishing a sense of justice (e.g., Adams, 1965; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997), feelings of satisfaction and justice achieved in particular indicate that a certain revenge goal has been reached. Nevertheless, it may be interesting and worthwhile to use different conceptualizations of victims'

post-revenge reactions in order to examine whether different contextual conditions have differential effects on these outcomes.

A possible limitation concerning the interpretation of Studies 1 and 2 is that our dependent measures may not reflect peoples' true sense of satisfaction (or feelings of regret), but rather a vague intuition of how they *would* have reacted. For example, research on affective forecasting has demonstrated that people are sometimes erroneous in predicting affective states (e.g., Wilson & Gilbert, 2003). In particular, would-be avengers tend to falsely believe that their vengeful reaction would make them feel happy (Carlsmith et al., 2008). In contrast, more recent research suggests that avengers are indeed able to make pretty accurate predictions about how revenge will affect their sense of satisfaction and justice achieved (Funk et al., 2014; Study 1). Thus, empirical evidence on affective forecasting in vengeful situations is rather mixed. Nevertheless, in Study 3, participants were given the opportunity to actually take revenge and report their true experience of justice-related satisfaction and regret.

The percentage of participants who decide to take displaced revenge did not vary as a function of our manipulation in Study 3. On the one hand, this eliminates potential confounding factors; on the other hand, it seems to speak against earlier findings showing that displaced revenge is more likely the more entitative the transgressor group is perceived to be (e.g., Stenstrom et al., 2008). However, one has to consider that in previous research displaced (or vicarious) revenge has been conceptualized as the severity of punishment taken against the entire group and not against one specific member of that group (see above). In our design, participants were asked to decide *whether* revenge should be taken instead of assigning the *amount* of punishment. These differences may at least partly explain the divergent findings between our and others' research. Of course, this speculation requires further investigation.

Taken together, the present research shows that even displaced revenge can taste sweet and lead to a sense of re-established justice. Victims' satisfaction with revenge may be interpreted as an indicator that a certain goal has been achieved (see e.g., Funk et al., 2014; Gollwitzer et al., 2011). Therefore, the next important step is to elucidate exactly what that goal is: Does displaced revenge against entitative groups feel good because each member of the group is seen as a perpetrator? Does it feel good because it possibly deters future victimization? Does it feel good because the message underlying vengeful reactions ("don't mess with me") is more likely to be spread in highly entitative groups? In the following, we will elaborate on these explanations and discuss potential mechanisms that can account for the effect we found.

First, one explanation of our findings would be that displaced revenge is simply about righting a wrong, as, for example, a "just deserts" perspective would suggest (e.g., Carlsmith & Darley, 2008; Carlsmith, Darley, & Robinson, 2002). According to this perspective, punishment should be proportional to the severity of the initial transgression or to the moral wrongfulness of the actor's intentions. Put differently, perpetrators ought to receive punishment simply because they deserve it. As outlined above, perceptions of entitativity amplify attributions of mind and collective responsibility to a group (see Waytz & Young, 2012). Thus, the effect of perceived entitativity on satisfaction after displaced revenge could be explained by perceptions of deservingness: the more entitative the group is perceived to be, the more does each individual group member deserve to be punished.

A second possible mechanism can be drawn from deterrence theory (McCullough, Kurzban, & Tabak, 2010, 2013). Deterrence theory assumes that revenge aims at preventing the original transgressor and other would-be transgressors from committing similar offenses in the future. Thus, deterrence theory would argue that the effect of perceived entitativity on satisfaction after displaced revenge implies that other potential transgressors have been successfully deterred from following the original perpetrator's example.

Finally, a third possible mechanism builds on the assumption that revenge aims at delivering a message to the original offender

(and no-one else). From that perspective, the uninvolved third-party target is merely a messenger, and the ultimate goal of displaced revenge is to deliver a message to the original offender through this messenger. In highly entitative groups in which group members are likely to interact and communicate more frequently with each other, transmitting the message ("don't mess with me") to the original offender is more likely than in low entitative groups in which group members do not interact much (see Gollwitzer & Sjöström, *in press*). Based on the present data, we cannot say which of these explanations can sufficiently explain the results we obtained in our studies. Therefore, it is left to future research to illuminate the driving forces and the psychological dynamics underlying displaced revenge.

On a more general level, our results elucidate the distinct roles of similarity and interconnectedness as sub-facets of entitativity and contribute to the ongoing scientific debate about the conceptualization of entitativity (e.g., Lickel et al., 2000; Yzerbyt, Judd, & Corneille, 2004). In this context, it is worth discussing the role of group entitativity in displaced revenge reactions. Across all three studies, we conceptualized entitativity as an independent variable that influences satisfaction after retaliation against targets beyond the initial perpetrator. However, one should keep in mind that perceptions of entitativity are not really "independent variables." In real-world situations, especially in (violent) conflicts, entitativity perceptions often serve as a justification to retaliate against other individuals and groups (e.g., Lickel, 2012). Stenstrom et al. (2008) provide empirical evidence that in-group identification leads to distorted perceptions of out-group entitativity: highly identified persons are particularly motivated to see the transgressor group as entitative in order to justify retaliation against the entire group. This finding clearly illustrates that perceptions of entitativity in real-world contexts are shaped by the presence of a conflict and its history. The design of our studies and the use of rather neutral groups might have alleviated such justification tendencies; however, one should consider that entitativity in real-world conflicts is also construed by avengers to justify their vengeful actions.

Conclusion

The brutal murder of Lee Rigby is only one case among many that exemplifies displaced revenge as a pervasive phenomenon that is not fully understood yet. The present research sheds light on the circumstances under which displaced revenge has hedonic benefits for the avenger. More precisely, we show that displaced revenge is more satisfying when the group the target and the transgressor belong to is highly entitative. In this regard, our results also underscore the important role of both similarity and interconnectedness between group members. On a conceptual level, these three studies advance our understanding of displaced revenge by showing that it can actually achieve a sense of justice. By doing this, they pave the way to directly investigate the goal underlying vengeful actions in a next step. On a broader level, this research enriches our understanding of the dynamics underlying violent and often intractable intergroup conflicts (e.g., Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994). By investigating the forces driving displaced revenge we ultimately gain a better insight into the nature of violent conflicts, ranging from small-scale conflicts between street gangs to large-scale conflicts between nations.

Acknowledgments

We thank Roger Giner-Sorolla and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful and constructive feedback on an earlier version of this paper. We thank Marlene Batzke, Elina Erz, Laura Heilig, Theo Schäfer, and Daniela Seng for their help in Study 3. This research was financially supported by the Interdisciplinary Research Training Group "Group-focused Enmity" (funded by the German Research Foundation) at the Universities of Marburg and Bielefeld (GRK 884).

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4 MANUSCRIPT #2

Sjöström, A., & Gollwitzer, M. (2015). What Makes Displaced Revenge Taste Sweet:

Imposing Displaced Just Deserts or Sending a Message? Submitted for publication in
European Journal of Social Psychology.

Submission date: March 16, 2015

**What Makes Displaced Revenge Taste Sweet: Imposing Displaced Just Deserts or
Sending a Message?**

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Word count: 9,193 [excluding references]

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Abstract

The present paper aims to elucidate what avengers hope to achieve when they take displaced revenge: imposing just deserts or delivering a message. For this purpose, we examine the contextual conditions under which avengers taking displaced revenge, experience satisfaction and a sense of justice achieved. Two studies were conducted. Study 1 ($N = 277$) shows that displaced revenge is satisfying, when the group continued to exist in its original form, but not when the offender left the group or when the group dissolves. Study 2 ($N = 121$) shows that displaced revenge leads to the highest levels of satisfaction when both the original offender and the target of revenge understood why revenge was taken. Together, both studies corroborate the notion that displaced revenge aims at delivering a message and that this message has to be understood by the offender and the target of revenge.

[144 words]

Keywords: revenge, vicarious retribution, displaced revenge, justice, group conflict.

What Makes Displaced Revenge Taste Sweet: Imposing Displaced Just Deserts or Sending a Message?

On August 19, 2014, the radical Islamist terror group Islamic State (IS) released a video on YouTube, which shows the beheading of James Foley, a U.S. photojournalist and war reporter. In this video Foley is seen kneeling next to a masked man in a desert landscape. Before pulling out the knife to decapitate Foley, his executioner claimed the killing to be revenge for U.S. air strikes in Iraq. Without a doubt, James Foley was neither responsible for nor involved in these attacks. In that sense, this revenge was *displaced* because it is not taken against those who carried out or authorized the air strikes, but against an innocent person who merely shares group membership with them (Gollwitzer & Sjöström, in press). Needless to say, such acts of displaced revenge or vicarious retribution¹ are the hallmark of large-scale intergroup conflicts, leading to an escalation of violence (Lickel, Miller, Stenstrom, Denson, & Schmader, 2006; Lickel, 2012). And even though there is little doubt about the pervasiveness of this phenomenon, we have strikingly little knowledge about the psychological dynamics underlying such acts of displaced revenge.

Previous research on displaced revenge mainly investigated the conditions under which acts of displaced revenge are likely to occur (e.g., Gaertner, Iuzzini, & O'Mara, 2008; Newheiser, Sawaoka, & Dovidio, 2012; Pereira, Berent, Falomir-Pichastor, Staerklé, & Butera, 2015; Stenstrom, Lickel, Denson, & Miller, 2008). Building on and extending this line of research, recent findings show that individuals who engage in displaced revenge experience satisfaction and a sense of justice achieved when the target and the original offender belong to a group that is perceived to be interactive and, at the same time, similar in appearance, that is, a highly entitative group (Sjöström & Gollwitzer, 2015). Avengers' satisfaction after revenge may be interpreted as an indicator that a certain goal – whatever it is – has been achieved. Therefore, a next important step would be to elucidate what exactly this goal is or, in other words, what avengers hope to achieve when they take displaced revenge.

Building upon the notion that direct revenge aims at delivering a message (“don’t mess with me!”; Funk, Gollwitzer, & McGeer, 2014; Gollwitzer, Meder, & Schmitt, 2011), we argue that displaced revenge alike might achieve a sense of justice when it effectively delivers a message to the offender (and potentially other members of his or her group). By contrast, a rivaling explanation of previous findings on the “sweet taste” of displaced revenge could be that avengers simply seek to impose “just deserts” upon the target (cf. Carlsmith, Darley, & Robinson, 2002). In order to test these two explanations in the present set of studies, we examine under which circumstances revenge actually is satisfying (“sweet”). Knowing when avengers are satisfied with revenge might not only be an interesting question for and in itself, but it may also provide us with a deeper psychological insight into the goals underlying vengeful actions. Not least, a more precise and deeper understanding of these dynamics is pivotal for developing strategies to prevent and eventually reconcile vengeful intergroup conflicts.

Two studies will be presented in this article. The theoretical rationale underlying both studies will be developed prior to each study as we approach the central question from slightly different angles. In Study 1, we manipulated the permanence of the offender’s group after the initial offence (i.e., whether the offender’s group continued to exist in its original form, whether the offender left the group, or whether the entire group dissolved). This design enables us to rule out that displaced revenge primarily serves to achieve “just deserts,” which would implicate that revenge should be satisfying even if the group dissolved. Moreover, if displaced revenge aims at delivering a message to the offender this requires the group to exist in its original form. In Study 2, we manipulated target and offender reactions to the victim’s intent to avenge and explore when avengers feel more satisfaction and justice achieved. This enables us to explicitly test whether displaced revenge serves to deliver a message, and if so, to whom exactly this message is addressed. Together, both studies attempt to elucidate the mechanism underlying displaced revenge and examine what avengers hope to achieve when

they take displaced revenge – imposing just deserts or delivering a message.

Study 1

As mentioned above, one possible mechanism underlying displaced revenge builds on the notion that retributive punishment is a communicative act between the punisher and the offender (e.g., Duff, 2001; Morris, 1981; Nozick, 1981). In this vein, acts of direct revenge aim at delivering a message (“don’t mess with me!”) to the offender (Funk et al., 2014; Gollwitzer & Denzler, 2009; Gollwitzer et al., 2011; see also French, 2001; Vidmar, 2001). Recent research even provides evidence for the validity of these dynamics beyond classical revenge dyads: U.S. Americans experienced higher levels of satisfaction, psychological closure, and a sense of re-gained justice to the extent that they believed that the assassination of former Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in May 2011 sent a strong message to the Taliban not to mess with the U.S. (Gollwitzer et al., 2014). Accordingly, one might argue that displaced revenge can be satisfying and achieve a sense of justice when it effectively delivers a message to the original offender. But how can revenge taken against any member of the offender’s group send a message to the actual offender? In *highly entitative* groups, it is indeed conceivable that the message embedded in revenge against one member of a group is spread and eventually carried forward to other members including the original offender. Entitativity (Campbell, 1958) describes the degree to which a group is perceived to form a coherent social unit in which members are connected to each other and frequently interact (e.g., Gaertner & Schopler, 1998; Hamilton, Sherman, & Lickel, 1998; Igarashi & Kashima, 2011; Lickel et al., 2000; Rutchick, Hamilton, & Sack, 2008). Therefore, members of entitative groups are more likely to communicate and exchange messages, such as news and rumors, with each other (Lott & Lott, 1964; Weenig & Midden, 1991). Consequently, chances that the message reaches the actual offender are higher in highly entitative groups compared to lowly entitative groups. In that sense, displaced revenge could be satisfying because it sends a message to the original offender. We will refer to this explanation as the *message*

hypothesis.

By contrast, one might argue that displaced revenge is actually satisfying because each member of the offender's group itself is seen as a "quasi-offender," and, thus, a viable target for one's punishment. In this way, displaced revenge would simply be about righting a wrong, as a "just deserts" (or deservingness) perspective suggests (Kant, 1797; see also Carlsmith et al., 2002; Carlsmith & Darley, 2008; Crockett, Özdemir, & Fehr, 2014). According to the just deserts perspective, retributive actions are backward-looking and driven by concerns to deliver punishment appropriate to the severity and moral wrongfulness of a given harm. In other words, offenders should be punished because they simply deserve it. But how can an individual who has not been personally involved in an offense be actually held responsible for it? Research has shown that in groups which are highly entitative, responsibility ascriptions for transgressions radiate beyond the specific offender (Sherman & Percy, 2011). More precisely, observers view *all* members of highly entitative groups as being more personally responsible for negative acts committed by other members of the same group (Lickel, Schmader, & Hamilton, 2003). In particular, observers perceive all members of an offender's group as being indirectly involved in the action – either because they failed to prevent or even actively promoted the offense (Denson, Lickel, Curtis, Stenstrom, & Ames, 2006; Lickel et al., 2003). Consider, for example, that one person out of a group of friends suddenly starts a brawl in a pub. One might easily be inclined to think that his friends encouraged him to fight or at least missed to withhold him from doing so. In that sense, each member of the offender's group can be considered as individually responsible for the brawl due to her or his involvement in what actually was the action of one single person (e.g., Hamilton, Sherman, & Castelli, 2002). Responsibility judgments about individuals beyond the offender are potentially even more amplified by attributions of dispositions underlying all group members (Yzerbyt, Corneille, & Estrada, 2001; Yzerbyt, Rogier, & Fiske, 1998; Rothbart & Taylor, 1992). In sum, the evidence on group perception and responsibility points to one conclusion:

the more a group is perceived to be entitative, the more its members are perceived as interchangeable and individually accountable for the decisions and actions that were taken against the victim (see Crawford, Sherman, & Hamilton, 2002; Hamilton, Sherman, Crump, & Spencer-Rodgers, 2009). In particular, the tendency to hold members of highly entitative groups accountable for other members' misdeeds is even amplified in victims (Doosje, Zebel, Scheermeijer, & Mathyi, 2007; Stenstrom et al., 2008). Following this reasoning, each member can be seen as being individually responsible and equally deserving of punishment. Hence, displaced revenge could be satisfying, because it simply serves to give the target her or his "(displaced) just deserts" for an offense s/he contributed to in the eyes of the avenger. We will refer to this explanation as the *displaced just deserts hypothesis*.

The goal of Study 1 is to test whether displaced revenge primarily serves to give targets their displaced just deserts or whether it potentially serves to deliver a message to the original offender. If the displaced just deserts hypothesis was true, revenge against any member of a highly entitative group should be satisfying even if, for example, the group dissolved: Each member has incurred individual responsibility for decisions and actions of one group member (i.e., the offender), and therefore deserves punishment. Alternatively, displaced revenge may serve to deliver a message to the original offender (the "message hypothesis"). According to this message hypothesis, revenge should only be satisfying if the group (e.g., a rival street gang, a sports team) continued to exist in its original form (i.e., with the offender). Otherwise, members cannot communicate and the message cannot be carried forward to the actual offender. To rule out that it is the mere existence of the group (irrespective of the specific offender) that makes displaced revenge a satisfying experience, we included a condition in which the group exists, but without the offender. Both hypotheses were tested in an online vignette study in which we manipulated group permanence (i.e., group dissolves vs. offender left group vs. group still exists) and whether or not (displaced) revenge was exacted by the participant in the role of the protagonist of the vignette.

Method

Procedure. Participants were recruited via different German online forums on various topics (e.g., sports, news, gaming) and a large social networking service. In return for participation, respondents were rewarded with a raffle ticket for a MP3-player. They were randomly assigned to experimental conditions in a 3 (group dissolves vs. offender left vs. group still exists) \times 2 (no revenge vs. displaced revenge) between-subjects design. After informed consent was obtained, demographic variables were assessed. Next, participants were asked to read a short vignette. To make it easier for participants to immerse themselves in the described situation, they could choose an area of personal relevance (university, working life, or leisure activity), which provided the general setting of the vignette. All three settings contained a situation in which the protagonist was provoked by a person and – depending on experimental conditions – either took displaced revenge (i.e., revenge against an innocent person that was related to the offender) or not. Both the offender's and the displaced target's gender were matched with participants' gender. Materials were adapted from Sjöström and Gollwitzer (2015).

First, participants were given information about the scenario. For example, in the working life vignette they learned that they (as the protagonist of the vignette) had been employed for many years in the sales department of a company, doing their work with conscientiousness and reliability. Next, the group of the later offender ("Christian" or "Christiane") was introduced. Depending on the scenario, either another department of the same company, a student learning group, or a sports club was described in a way that portrays a highly entitative group. For example, participants who chose the working life scenario were told:

Christian(e), a colleague of yours, works together with Philipp, Anna, and Daniel(a) in the support department. Those four really like each other and regularly spend their lunch break together, talking about their professional achievements and sometimes

disparagingly about the failures of other departments. Altogether, there is a strong cohesion between Christian(e), Philipp, Anna, and Daniel(a). They seem to understand each other blindly.

Provocation. Next, the vignette described an important business meeting that they (i.e., the participant) attended together with a colleague from the aforementioned support department (“Christian/e”). During the meeting Christian(e) suddenly criticized them very harshly before the management board. Later, it turned out that they had been designated for a promotion, and that Christian(e) tried to reduce the participant’s chances of receiving the promotion by criticizing them in front of the management. Eventually, participants learned that they were not promoted with the proposed promotion.

Following the provocation, participants were asked to rate the amount of anger they experienced, their perception of injustice, and their desire to take revenge with single items on 6-point Likert scales ranging from 1 to 6. Verbal anchors differed depending on the wording of the item (e.g., “After this incident I felt angry,” 1 = *not at all*, 6 = *very much*). Crucially, the perpetrator’s name was never mentioned in these items.

Group Permanence. Next, we manipulated *whether* and *how* the group to which the offender belonged continued to exist after the provocation. Participants were informed that the group (a) has either dissolved in the meantime (e.g., “*members of the support department were relocated and distributed across several rooms and buildings; they no longer have contact with each other on a regular basis*”), that (b) the offender has left the group (e.g., “*Christian(e) was sent abroad for some time and is thus not contactable for his/her colleagues*”), or that (c) the group still exists (e.g., “*members of the support department have a lunch appointment this week as usual*”).

Revenge Manipulation. Depending on experimental conditions, participants were instructed to imagine taking (vs. not taking) displaced revenge against another member of the offender’s group (this member was introduced as “Daniel” or “Daniela”). Participants were

informed that they received an e-mail from Daniel(a), a colleague of Christian(e) from the support department, via a mailing list. In this e-mail, Daniel(a) made some disparaging remarks about his or her supervisor. Participants in the *displaced revenge* condition were then told:

You print out this e-mail and put it into the post box of his/her supervisor. The supervisor immediately reacts and asks Daniel(a) for an official personnel conversation.

Participants in the *no revenge* condition were told:

You simply delete this mail.

Dependent Variable: Justice-related Satisfaction. Next, participants were asked to rate their agreement with 19 items covering different affective (e.g., satisfaction, joy) as well as justice-related responses (e.g., “I feel satisfied with how things worked out”) on 6-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). The full list of items is provided in the Appendix A. We performed a principal-axis factor analysis with oblique (oblimin) rotation on affective and justice-related items to guide the construction of our justice-related satisfaction scale. Three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted, accounting for 54% of the total variance. As in previous research on the dynamics of vengeful actions, we were primarily interested in differences in experienced satisfaction and a sense of re-established justice (Funk et al., 2014; Gollwitzer et al., 2011). Nevertheless, we included measures of different responses for exploratory purposes. Based on the results of the factor analysis (see Appendix B for the factor loading matrix) we built a justice-related satisfaction scale consisting of seven items (i.e., satisfaction, contentment, relief, joy, “Now I experience a sense of closure,” “Everything turned out to be satisfactory for me,” “Justice has been restored”). Together, these items formed a reliable scale (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .85$).

Group Mind, Group Member Mind, and Responsibility. To explore whether the group permanence manipulation effects ascriptions of mind (i.e., capacity to make plans, have

intentions, and think for itself) and responsibility for actions committed by group members, we included five items taken from Waytz and Young (2012). More precisely, participants were asked to rate the extent to which (a) the offender group has a mind, the extent to which (b) individual group members have a mind, the extent to which (c) the group is responsible for group actions, (d) group members are responsible for individual actions, and (e) group members are responsible for group actions. In particular, these items were included to explore how responsibility attributed to other members for the offender's misdeed varies depending on our group permanence manipulation. Therefore, items will be analyzed separately. Ratings were obtained on 6-point scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very much*).

Next, participants were asked to answer three questions about group permanence (e.g., "Do members of the group still meet each other?" yes/no) and to rate how easy it was for them to picture themselves in the described situation on a 5-point scale (1 = *very difficult* to 5 = *very easy*). Finally, they were asked to write comments about the experiment in an open text field.

Sample. Altogether, two hundred and ninety-seven participants completed the experiment. First, we inspected the data for implausible values. Eight cases (3%) were omitted due to identical answers on all items or extreme values (e.g., participants who only used values of 1 and 6 to answer on a 1–6-point Likert scale) on the dependent variables as indicators of a lack of attention. Next, we identified cases with noticeably long or short completion times. Six univariate (2%) outliers with extremely long completion times (i.e., z -values > 3 , equals 37 minutes, $M_{\text{duration}} = 9$ minutes) were excluded from the sample.² Moreover, data from six further respondents (2%) were excluded due to comments at the end of the study that suggested suspicion or problems with the given task (e.g., had problems with understanding instructions, guessed the purpose of the study).³ Thus, our final sample comprised 277 participants (51% female). Ages ranged between 18 and 89 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 31.40$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.22$).

Results

Preliminary Analyses. Altogether, 72% of the participants correctly remembered whether the group still exists, dissolved or whether the offender left the group. Participants had no difficulties picturing themselves as protagonists in the vignettes ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.94$) since this item was rated significantly above the response scale's mid-point, $t(276) = 8.04$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.48$. Importantly, no differences in the ability to picture themselves in the vignettes were found between scenarios ($M_{\text{working life}} = 3.56$, $SD = 0.97$, $M_{\text{university}} = 3.34$, $SD = 0.91$, $M_{\text{leisure activity}} = 3.45$, $SD = 0.94$), $F(2, 274) = 0.94$, $p = .39$, $\eta^2 = .01$. Across all scenarios, participants experienced an equal amount of anger ($M_{\text{working life}} = 4.70$, $M_{\text{university}} = 4.39$, $M_{\text{leisure activity}} = 4.38$), the provocation was considered as equally unjust ($M_{\text{working life}} = 4.66$, $M_{\text{university}} = 4.37$, $M_{\text{leisure activity}} = 4.61$) and equally likely to elicit vengeful desires ($M_{\text{working life}} = 3.29$, $M_{\text{university}} = 3.33$, $M_{\text{leisure activity}} = 2.98$), $F_s(2, 274) \leq 1.62$, $p_s \geq .20$, partial $\eta^2 \leq .01$. Crucially, vignette type did not moderate any of the effects that are reported in the following paragraphs ($p_s > .24$, partial $\eta^2 \leq .01$).

Justice-Related Satisfaction. A 3 (group permanence) \times 2 (revenge) ANOVA with justice-related satisfaction as the dependent variable revealed a significant main effect of revenge: Participants in the no revenge condition felt more satisfaction ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 0.91$) than participants in the displaced revenge condition ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 1.01$), $F(1, 271) = 8.58$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. This main effect was qualified by a significant group permanence \times revenge interaction effect, $F(2, 271) = 4.05$, $p = .02$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$ (see Figure 1). Post-hoc tests using Bonferroni adjustment revealed a simple main effect of the group permanence factor within the displaced revenge condition ($F(2, 271) = 4.57$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .03$) but not within the no revenge condition ($F(2, 271) = 1.21$, $p = .29$, $\eta^2 = .01$). Follow-up tests revealed that participants who imagined taking displaced revenge reported higher levels of satisfaction in the group still exists ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.04$) condition compared to the group dissolves ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 1.00$), $p = .003$, $d = 0.53$, and to the offender left condition ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 0.91$),

$p = .048$, $d = 0.40$. The two latter groups did not reliably differ from each other, $p = .40$, $d = 0.16$.

When the group dissolves ($M_{\text{no revenge}} = 2.72$, $SD = 0.91$ vs. $M_{\text{displaced revenge}} = 2.17$, $SD = 1.00$) or the offender left the group ($M_{\text{no revenge}} = 2.92$, $SD = 0.87$ vs. $M_{\text{displaced revenge}} = 2.32$, $SD = 0.91$), participants in the no revenge condition experienced more satisfaction than displaced avengers ($ps < .01$, $ds \geq 0.57$). However, there was no difference in justice-related satisfaction scores between the displaced revenge and no revenge condition when the group still exists ($p = .52$, $d = 0.13$). No main effect for group permanence was found, $F(2, 271) = 1.21$, $p = .29$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$.⁴ Altogether, taking displaced revenge was satisfying only when the group to which the original offender and the displaced target belonged continued to exist in its original form. This lends first evidence for the message hypothesis and speaks against the displaced just deserts hypothesis.

Group Mind, Group Member Mind, and Responsibility. Additionally, we investigated the effect of group permanence on general attributions of mind and responsibility. Results revealed main effects of revenge on the group mind and group member mind measure ($Fs \geq 7.62$, $ps \leq .03$, partial $\eta^2 \geq .03$). Participants who imagined taking displaced revenge attributed more mind to the group as a whole ($M_{\text{displaced revenge}} = 4.48$, $SD = 1.26$ vs. $M_{\text{no revenge}} = 4.05$, $SD = 1.32$) and to single group members ($M_{\text{displaced revenge}} = 4.57$, $SD = 1.28$ vs. $M_{\text{no revenge}} = 4.07$, $SD = 1.42$) than participants who imagined taking no revenge. This result is in line with the notion that avengers are motivated to see the offender group as agentic and responsible (Stenstrom et al., 2008). Interestingly, we found a group permanence main effect on responsibility judgments of single members for group actions ($F(2, 271) = 4.01$, $p = .02$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$). Post-hoc tests using Bonferroni adjustment revealed that participants attributed more responsibility to group members for group actions in the group still exists condition ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 1.13$) than in the group dissolves condition ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.41$), $p = .02$, $d = 0.41$. However, no difference was found between the group still exists

($M = 4.50$, $SD = 1.13$) and the offender left condition ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 1.33$), $p = .31$, $d = 0.27$. This result indicates that the difference in justice-related satisfaction after taking displaced revenge between these two conditions cannot be explained by differences in ascribed responsibility (or deservingness). More precisely, the fact that displaced avengers were less satisfied when the offender left cannot be explained by avengers' perception that the remaining group members (including the displaced revenge target) were seen as less responsible and hence less deserving of punishment after the offender left the group. Notably, ratings for group members' responsibility for individual actions ($M = 5.25$, $SD = 1.13$), and group responsibility for group actions ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 1.41$) were high across conditions, but did not differ depending on group permanence or revenge ($F_s \leq 2.50$, $p_s \geq .12$, partial $\eta^2 \leq .01$).

Discussion

Results of Study 1 show that displaced revenge was less satisfying when the group of the offender dissolved or when the offender has left the group. By contrast, avengers experienced more satisfaction and a sense of justice achieved when the offender's group continued to exist. Two implications can be derived from these findings: First, there is more about displaced revenge than just achieving "just deserts." If the displaced just deserts hypothesis was true, justice-related satisfaction should not differ between the three group permanence conditions. Group members other than the original offender still would deserve punishment for the misdeed they contributed to in the eyes of the avenger. One might argue that members are perceived as less responsible in the group dissolves condition and therefore less deserving of punishment (see above). However, if punishment was solely based on grounds of responsibility incurred by group members for misdeeds of their fellow member, there should be at least no difference in justice-related satisfaction scores between the offender left and group exists conditions as responsibility ratings did not differ between those two conditions. Notably, responsibility ratings of individual members for group actions were

relatively high across conditions ($M = 4.21$), although items were formulated in a general way and not specified to the present case. One might speculate that scores would have been even higher had we directly asked about the responsibility of the specific target.

Second, results obtained in Study 1 hint at the pivotal role of the original offender in displaced revenge episodes: Displaced revenge was more satisfying when the actual offender remained in the group (regardless of responsibility ascriptions to other group members), perhaps because she or he has to get the message embedded in revenge. Indeed, we are aware that we did not directly test the assumption that displaced revenge is about sending a message to the original offender in this study. However, the fact that the original offender stays in this group is a *sine qua non* that she or he eventually receives a potential message. Interestingly, these results further raise the question whether displaced revenge is satisfying because it potentially delivers a message solely to the original offender, irrespective of other members, or whether it is likely important that other members (e.g., the target) receive the message as well (see Gollwitzer & Sjöström, in press).

In sum, Study 1 refutes the displaced just deserts hypothesis, which assumes that displaced revenge feels good because each member of the group (e.g., the target) is seen as an equally viable offender deserving punishment. Results may rather be interpreted in a way that they lend indirect support to the notion that displaced revenge aims at delivering a message. Notably, displaced revenge was only satisfying when a crucial precondition for the message being delivered (i.e., the existence of the group in its original form) was met. In Study 2, we will explicitly test to whom a revenge message is addressed.

Study 2

Previous findings on the dynamics of “sweet revenge” (Funk et al., 2014; Gollwitzer & Denzler, 2009; Gollwitzer et al., 2011) and results of Study 1 may be considered as a first indication that displaced revenge, just like direct revenge, serves to deliver a message. In displaced revenge episodes in which the target of revenge is not the actual offender, however,

things are more complex. Focusing on the two critical agents in displaced revenge episodes (i.e., original offender and displaced target), the question inevitably arises *to whom* the message underlying revenge (“don’t mess with me!”) is actually directed to.

One answer could be that *any* member of the offender’s group should receive and understand the message (*vicarious understanding hypothesis*). As the evidence reviewed above suggests, members of highly entitative groups are seen as exchangeable and replaceable (e.g., Crawford et al., 2002). Therefore, any member of the offender’s group is a viable target for one’s displaced revenge and for the message this revenge entails. In other words, revenge should lead to feelings of satisfaction as soon as the message is received and understood by the displaced target. Notably, our findings from Study 1 speak against this hypothesis. In this study, revenge was only satisfying if the group continued to exist in its original form including the original offender. Nevertheless, in order to gain more confidence in these findings, we tested the vicarious understanding hypothesis more directly in Study 2.

A second answer could be that displaced revenge primarily serves to deliver a message to the original offender (*offender understanding hypothesis*). After all, the offender is the one that personally has made the victim suffer. As mentioned above, the theoretical notion that revenge aims at delivering a message to the actual perpetrator has been empirically backed up in interpersonal contexts by results showing that avengers only experience satisfaction when offenders react to the victim’s intent to punish (e.g., Funk et al., 2014). By contrast, when avengers did not receive any feedback from the offender, revenge was not satisfying. In light of these findings, revenge in displaced episodes may also be explicitly conceptualized as a communicative act between the victim and the original offender. Revisiting results of Study 1 may lend first evidence to this notion: displaced revenge was only satisfying if the offender remained in the group. Thus, according to the offender understanding hypothesis, displaced revenge is only satisfying if it effectively delivers a message to the original offender.

A third answer could be that—especially in highly entitative groups—the message is

not only addressed at the individual offender; it might also be important that the message is effectively delivered to and understood by other group members as well (*offender-and-target understanding hypothesis*). Although the individual offender as the immediate source of injustice actually made the victim suffer, other members (including the target) are seen as contributing to the offense (e.g., Lickel et al., 2003). Therefore, it may be equally important that the message not to “mess” with the victim is sent not only to the original offender, but also to other group members. According to the offender-and-target understanding hypothesis, displaced revenge should only elicit satisfaction if the message is understood by both the original offender *and* the displaced target.

The goal of Study 2 was to test these three hypotheses (vicarious understanding, offender understanding, and offender-and-target understanding). For this purpose, we conducted a lab experiment, in which we manipulated target and offender reactions to revenge (“understanding”) as indicators of successfully delivering of a message (e.g., Funk et al., 2014). To rule out the possibility that displaced revenge is an end in itself (i.e., satisfying irrespective of the feedback), we included one control condition in which participants received no feedback at all. The setting of Study 2, moreover, enabled participants to actually take revenge following an offense and report their true experience of justice-related satisfaction, instead of merely imagining so (as in Study 1).

Method

Procedure. Upon arrival in the lab, participants were told that the main purpose of the experiment was to investigate “reading comprehension in cooperation situations,” whereas a second part was concerned with a different topic which would be explained later. Moreover, participants were told that the study was conducted at two universities at the same time and that they would be paired with three other students to work on a collective task. After participants gave informed consent, the experimenter simulated a telephone conversation ostensibly with the investigator in charge at the other location. This was done to make the

cover story more credible.

Following these general information, participants had the possibility to exchange short messages in order to introduce themselves to each other. The staged self-introduction of the bogus participant group at the other university always portrayed a highly entitative group. Typing errors in the original text were intentionally added to increase credibility. The text read as follows:

We just decided to write this text together. We are Alex, Luca, and Chris. When we were asked after lunch, we thought it would be a good idea to take part in the experiment. We know each other since the beginning of our studies and do a lot together, especially partying. We can talk about everything. This year we also registered for a sport course together.

Next, participants were virtually paired with one of these ostensible students located at the other university and instructed to work together on an anagram task (see also Gollwitzer et al., 2011, Study 3). Participants and their ostensible partners were asked to solve individually as many anagrams as possible within two minutes. For each anagram correctly solved during this time both players earned two raffle ticket toward a 50€ (approx. 68 US-\$) gift card for a cinema. They were informed that the winner would be drawn directly after the game. Participants solved 6.85 anagrams on average. The number of solved anagrams of participants' ostensible partners was programmed to be roughly equal to the number of anagrams solved by themselves. Both players were asked to make a recommendation for distributing the raffle tickets between them. The final distribution was obtained by averaging the two recommendations. On average, participants recommended a fairly equal split ($M = 54\%$ for their partner, $SD = 14\%$). The ostensible partner, however, always recommended 90% for him- or herself. Moreover, she or he was ostensibly drawn as the winner of the gift certificate. This paradigm has been successfully used in prior research on vengeful reactions (e.g., Sjöström & Gollwitzer, 2015). After the lottery, participants were asked to rate their

current mood. Importantly, this questionnaire included three items related to anger and moral outrage (anger, fury, outrage; Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$). Moreover, participants were asked to evaluate the game and rate their partner's fairness ("The behavior of my partner was fair"). Ratings for all items were obtained on a 6-point Likert-Scale (1 = *not at all*, 6 = *very much*).

Displaced Revenge. Next, participants were informed that the following part of the session was concerned with "punishment" and that a new test for indirect punitive desires would be used. Participants were told that this test would assess objective and reliable information about the extent to which they harbored vengeful desires. After completing this test (which resembled an Implicit Association Test; see Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998) participants received false feedback about their vengeful desires following the unfair distribution of raffle tickets. The procedure was adapted for the present context from Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk and Kluwer (2003), who successfully used a similar technique to manipulate participants' forgiveness after an offense. Information on the detailed procedure is given in in Appendix C.

Instructions stated that on basis of the test results, participants would indeed harbor punitive desires, and that, therefore, one of their fellow players would be punished by assigning him or her to an unpleasant task. In this task, the punished player would have to watch aversive pictures and describe them verbally in detail (see also Gollwitzer & Denzler, 2009). Following this information, a random selection was staged to determine *which* participant would receive the unpleasant task. The recipient of the task always was Participant No. 3 (i.e., a displaced target).

Feedback Manipulation. After punishment was exerted (i.e., the unpleasant task was delivered to and received by Participant No. 3), participants received two messages, one from the original perpetrator ("Alex"/Participant No. 2) and one from the target of displaced revenge ("Luca"/Participant No. 3). In these messages the offender either signaled that she or he understood why his or her fellow group member had been punished ("*Hi—here is Alex. I*

guess Luca got the unpleasant task because I had distributed the lottery tickets unfairly...") or not (*"Hi, Alex here. I've no idea why you gave Luca this task"*). Additionally, the target either signaled that she or he understood why s/he received the unpleasant task (*"I think you gave me the picture task because Alex distributed the tickets so unfairly earlier on. Luca"*) or not (*"I have no idea why you gave me this task. Luca"*). In a fifth condition, participants did not receive any feedback at all. Taken together, the five experimental conditions were: (a) understanding signaled by offender *and* target, (b) understanding signaled only by offender, (c) understanding signaled only by target, (d) no understanding signaled, neither by offender nor by target, and (e) no feedback at all. As in the group description, typos were added in the messages to increase credibility.

Dependent Measure: Justice-Related Satisfaction. Following feedback, participants completed a questionnaire that assessed their mood and justice-related responses with the outcome of the situation (e.g., "I think that everybody got what they deserved," "I feel satisfaction"). They were asked to rate their agreement with 23 items on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 6 (see Appendix A for a full list of items). Verbal anchors differed according to item wording. To guide the construction of our satisfaction scale we performed a principal-axis factor analysis with oblique (oblimin) rotation on affective and justice-related items as in Study 1. Six factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted, accounting for 60% of the total variance (see Appendix B for rotated factor loadings). Based on these results, we built a satisfaction scale consisting of four items ("Justice has been served," "I feel satisfaction," "I think that everybody got what they deserved," "Justice has been restored"). Together, these items formed a reliable scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$).

Next, we assessed whether participants correctly understood ("According to the result of the punishment test, I had a desire to punish") and accepted the results of the punishment test ("I have the feeling that I took revenge," "I agree with the result of the punishment test," "I think that the result of the punishment test is correct"; Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$). To assess the

effectiveness of our feedback manipulation, we asked participants (1) whether specifically Participant No. 2 understood why Participant No. 3 received this task and (2) whether all other participants (i.e., including the target) understood why Participant No. 3 received the unpleasant task. Ratings were obtained on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*). Finally, we checked whether participants correctly identified which participant the target of revenge was and assessed demographic variables.

Sample. In total, 145 students were recruited in classes and on campus for a study entitled “reading comprehension in cooperation situations.” Fourteen participants (10%) expressed doubts about the existence of the other participants, correctly guessed that this study was designed to investigate vengeful responses, or reported language difficulties and were hence omitted from further analyses. Moreover, 12 participants (8%) did not indicate the correct target of revenge at the end of study and were, therefore, not included in the data analysis. Thus, our final sample consisted of 121 participants (63% female). Ages ranged from 18 to 39 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 22.68$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 3.30$).

Results

Preliminary Analyses. First, we analyzed participants’ self-reported anger following the lottery. On average, participants’ anger scores were rather low ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 1.38$, on a 1 to 6 point scale), which is a typical finding in lab settings (e.g., Gollwitzer et al., 2011). However, participants rather disagreed with the statement that the behavior of their partner was fair ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 1.38$), which was rated significantly below the response scale’s mid-point (3.5), $t(120) = -5.95$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.89$. Participants, by and large, agreed that the result of the punishment test suggested a desire for punishment ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.92$). This value was significantly higher than the scale’s mid-point (3.5), $t(120) = 6.43$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.32$. However, participants’ agreement with the result of the punishment test was admittedly low ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 0.98$). Nevertheless, it is important to note that belief in the results of the punishment test was positively correlated with our dependent measure of justice-related

satisfaction ($r = .38, p < .001$), indicating that the stronger people believed that the result reflected their true vengeful desires, the more satisfaction they experienced after displaced revenge was taken.

Manipulation Check Feedback. To assess the effectiveness of our feedback manipulations, planned contrasts were conducted with offender understanding and other group members' understanding as dependent variables, respectively. More precisely, we tested the conditions in which (a) the offender or (b) the target signaled understanding against the remaining three conditions. One should note that understanding ratings were generally higher in the no feedback condition compared to the no understanding condition. This difference was marginally significant for offenders (Welch's $t(47.68) = -1.88, p = .07, d = 0.53$) and significant for members (Welch's $t(46.22) = -2.98, p < .01, d = 0.84$). Given no feedback at all, participants possibly assume that offenders and targets understood why revenge was taken. As it is supposed to constitute the stricter test, we nevertheless decided to include the no feedback condition in the subsequent contrast analyses on perceived understanding ratings.

First, we tested whether understanding signaled by the offender was correctly recognized by participants. As expected, contrast analyses revealed that participants agreed more strongly that the offender understood why Participant No. 3 received the unpleasant task when they received an understanding message from the offender, Welch's $t(70.21) = 2.62, p = .01, d = 1.00$, compared to the conditions in which no feedback at all was given, no understanding by target and offender, or understanding solely by the target was signaled.

Second, we tested whether understanding signaled by the target was correctly identified by participants. Contrast analyses confirmed our expectations: participants agreed more strongly that the other group members understood why Participant No. 3 received the unpleasant task when the target signaled understanding, Welch's $t(57.17) = 2.68, p = .01, d = 0.82$, compared to the conditions in which no feedback was given, no understanding was

signaled or in which solely the offender signaled understanding. Taken together, offender and target understanding was manipulated successfully. Mean values are presented in Table 1.

Justice-Related Satisfaction. Planned contrasts with justice-related satisfaction as the dependent variable were conducted to test three hypotheses (the vicarious understanding hypothesis, the offender understanding hypothesis, and the offender-and-target understanding hypothesis). First of all, we tested the no understanding against the no feedback condition. This contrast was not significant, $t(116) = 0.83$, $p = .41$, $d = 0.25$. Thus, justice-related satisfaction scores did not reliably differ between participants who received two messages signaling no understanding and participants who received no feedback at all.

Secondly, we tested the vicarious understanding hypothesis, according to which satisfaction scores should be higher if any member of the offender's group signals understanding. Therefore, we tested the three conditions in which understanding was signaled either by the offender, the target or both against the no understanding and no feedback conditions. However, the contrast was not significant, $t(116) = 0.77$, $p = .44$, $d = 0.14$, which speaks against the vicarious understanding hypothesis.

Thirdly, we tested the offender understanding hypothesis, according to which satisfaction should be higher if the original offender signals understanding. In a first step, we tested the target understanding condition against the no understanding and no feedback condition. No difference was found, $t(116) = 0.05$, $p = .96$, $d = 0.07$. Next, we tested the offender-and-target understanding condition and offender understanding condition against the remaining three conditions. Inconsistent with the offender understanding hypothesis, this contrast was not significant, $t(116) = 1.47$, $p = .15$, $d = 0.27$.

Finally, we tested the offender-and-target understanding hypothesis which states that both, the offender and the target have to understand the message embedded in displaced revenge. In a first step, we tested the offender understanding condition against the target understanding condition, no understanding condition and the no feedback condition. No

difference was found, $t(116) = 0.05$, $p = .96$, $d = 0.04$. Next, we tested the offender-and-target understanding condition against the remaining four conditions. In line with the offender-and-target understanding hypothesis, this contrast was significant, $t(116) = 2.27$, $p = .03$, $d = 0.57$. Thus, only avengers who received an understanding message by both the offender *and* the target reported higher levels of satisfaction than avengers who solely received an understanding message by the offender, the target, or who received no understanding message or no feedback at all. Mean values are depicted in Figure 2.⁵

Discussion

First, results of Study 2 corroborate the notion that displaced revenge – like direct revenge – serves to deliver a message (Gollwitzer & Sjöström, in press). If displaced revenge was just about punishing as an end in itself, levels of satisfaction should not be sensitive to the feedback conditions. Although we had no condition in which no revenge was taken, the fact that justice-related satisfaction scores differ between feedback conditions may be interpreted as further evidence against the displaced just deserts hypothesis. Second, the message embedded in displaced revenge has to be understood by the original offender as well as by the target of revenge. This finding speaks for the offender-and-target understanding hypothesis.

In order to alleviate recurring problems of low revenge rates in previous laboratory studies on revenge (see Funk et al., 2014; Gollwitzer et al., 2011), we used a false feedback procedure on participants' vengeful desires. Although participants did not openly express skepticism toward the validity of this procedure, participants' agreement with the result of the bogus punishment test was relatively low. However, one should note that people often harbor vengeful desires, but only rarely admit to and act on this desire (e.g., Crombag, Rassin, & Horselenberg, 2003). In this vein, a low agreement might possibly result out of reactance (e.g., Brehm, 1966). This does not seem unreasonable since revenge is deemed as a socially undesirable behavior people do not want to be associated with and therefore deny the desire

for retaliation. Thus, participants' low agreement with the result of the punishment test may not necessarily indicate a lack of credibility of this procedure.

General Discussion

The present research attempts to elucidate what avengers expect to achieve when they take displaced revenge. For this purpose, we examined the conditions under which victims of injustice experience satisfaction and re-established justice after taking displaced revenge. In Study 1, we found no difference in justice-related satisfaction scores between conditions in which the group dissolves and in which the offender left the group. These results speak against the displaced just deserts hypothesis, which predicts that revenge is satisfying as long as any person of a highly entitative offender group receives punishment for the injustice committed, irrespective of whether the group dissolves or whether the offender has left the group. Conversely, results show that displaced revenge led to higher levels of satisfaction only when the group to which the offender and the target belong continued to exist with the offender. Importantly, this was the only condition in which the original offender was able to notice the act of revenge.

In Study 2, we show that displaced revenge leads to the highest levels of justice-related satisfaction when both critical agents of a displaced revenge episode – the original offender and the displaced target – signal understanding. Avengers who received an understanding message either solely by the target or solely by the offender experienced just as much satisfaction as participants who received no understanding message or no feedback at all. Thus, displaced revenge seemingly aims at sending a message to both the target *and* the original offender.

As this is the first research that attempts to elucidate the mechanism behind displaced revenge reactions, the two studies presented here are insightful in several ways. First, we found no support for the assumption that displaced revenge merely serves to impose (displaced) just deserts on the target; a notion that has been speculated about in previous

research (e.g., Newheiser et al., 2012), but has not been empirically tested before.

Second, it seems that high entitativity of a group does not automatically lead each member to be an adequate “surrogate” for the actual offender. When victims did not have the impression that the original offender understood why revenge was taken, displaced revenge did not elicit perceptions of satisfaction and justice among avengers. Thus, even if not directly targeted, the original offender still possesses a pivotal role in displaced revenge episodes.

Third, the present findings may also have the potential to diffuse into related domains of research and vice versa. For example, knowing what gives victims satisfaction is also helpful in tailoring reconciliation procedures to satisfy victims’ needs (cf. Shnabel, Nadler, Ullrich, Dovidio, & Carmi, 2009; Shnabel & Nadler, 2010). More precisely, even in situations in which a transgression was technically committed by an individual (as member of a group), it might not always be sufficient if only this specific offender acknowledges the injustice she or he has done to the victim. It rather seems to be important that his fellow group members also acknowledge the wrong done to the victim to eventually facilitate a successful reconciliation process. Interestingly, and on a related note, the question to whom a revenge message is primarily directed roughly corresponds to research on apologies in group settings and the related question of who is the “right” person to acknowledge a wrong (e.g., Govier & Vorwoerd, 2002). In the context of apologies, individuals as representatives of a group can apologize for harm done by other members or the entire group. In this vein, it may elicit feelings of satisfaction, if one member acknowledges the wrong committed on behalf of the entire group (e.g., “*we* know why you did this”) in displaced revenge context.

Altogether, one conclusion drawn from our research could be that a central goal underlying displaced vengeful desires is to deliver a message (Gollwitzer & Sjöström, in press). In this way, the present results add to previous work on intergroup conflicts in general (e.g., Bar-Tal, 2011) and intergroup vengeance in particular. For instance, these findings can conceptually advance the vicarious retribution model (Lickel et al., 2006), by including the

notion that displaced revenge is a goal-directed behavior that aims at sending a message to the offender and other members (i.e., the target of revenge) of the group.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Results from Study 1 show that revenge was only satisfying when the offender group continues to exist in its original form. In a similar vein, results of Study 2 reveal that displaced revenge leads to higher levels of satisfaction when the revenge message is understood by the offender and the target. An interesting question that follows from these findings is whether literally the entire group (i.e., each single member of that group) needs to receive the message. This would imply that as soon as any member leaves the group, satisfaction with revenge possibly decreases. This speculation, of course, requires further investigation, for example, additional conditions in which other group members – who were not part of the displaced revenge triad (victim, target, and offender) – react to revenge.

Future research may benefit from a more fine-grained analysis of the functional role of group entitativity. Apart from shared responsibility, entitativity provides the crucial structure for information and messages being exchanged between members of a group (Lott & Lott, 1964; Weenig & Midden, 1991). In this way, other members could be seen as “multipliers” of the message that has to be spread within the group to eventually reach the offender and other group members. Thus, revenge against targets of highly entitative groups would be satisfying because the chances that the message embedded in revenge is spread within the group are higher. However, this is a matter of speculation and needs further investigation.

Relatedly, it might be interesting to take a closer look at the hierarchical structure of a group and the different roles in it. For example, members with a leadership position are seen as prototypical group members and thus are predestined as targets of displaced revenge (see Lickel et al., 2006). Revenge against leaders may be particularly effective in sending a strong message to other members as they exert strong influence over other their fellows (e.g., Hogg, 2001).

Both studies presented here did not include the chance of further interactions and thereby eliminate the possibility of counter-revenge by the offender group. The possibility of counter-revenge, however, has been shown to decrease the likelihood of revenge against highly entitative groups (Newheiser & Dovidio, 2014). It would be interesting to investigate how the threat of counter-revenge impacts avengers' satisfaction. Recent research highlights that the revenge message entails a prompt for the offender to change attitudes and behavior toward the victim (Funk et al., 2014; see also Boon, Deveau, & Alibhai, 2009). In turn, this change may also be supposed to minimize the actual chance of counter-revenge by each single member of the offender group. Thus, avengers may nevertheless experience satisfaction in situations in which counter-revenge is feasible if the offender group signals a change in moral attitudes toward the victim. Future work may take the possibility of counter-retaliation into account to further explore the boundary conditions of displaced revenge.

Conclusion

Vengeful desires lay at the core of almost all violent conflicts and victims of retaliation are often neither responsible for nor involved in the injustice that initially sparks these desires. The central question what avengers actually hope to achieve by taking displaced revenge has not been considered so far. To address this question, we asked what makes displaced revenge taste sweet. Our findings show that displaced revenge is satisfying ("sweet") when it effectively sends a message to the target *and* to the original offender. With that in mind, we will return to the unspeakable act of savagery described in the introduction of this paper: the video that purportedly shows the execution of James Foley was released under the title "A message to America." The empirical work presented here is in line with the notion that a central goal underlying displaced revenge is to deliver a message to the offender and his or her fellow group members. In this way, the present research serves as another mosaic stone adding to a more refined understanding of the nature and dynamics of violent group conflicts.

Acknowledgments

We thank Marlene Batzke, Elina Erz, Selina Helmke, Michael Papendick, Theo Schäfer, and Jana Wielvers for their help in preparing and conducting Study 2. Study 2 was conducted and the manuscript prepared while the first author received a scholarship from the Department of Psychology of the Philipps-University Marburg.

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Footnotes

¹The terms retribution, punishment, retaliation and revenge will be used interchangeably in this article.

²To improve data quality and ensure that manipulations worked properly we excluded these participants from our analyses. Long completion times in web experiments usually indicate that respondents were interrupted or concerned with something else while completing the questionnaire and, for example, did not properly attend to the instructions (cf. Malhotra, 2008).

³ The pattern of results does not change, when these six participants were included in the analysis.

⁴ The other two factors were labeled *remorse* (8 items, $\alpha = .90$) and *anger* (3 items, $\alpha = .78$). Items of each scale are displayed in Appendix B. In order to investigate the impact of our group and revenge manipulation on these emotions, we calculated a 3 (group permanence) \times 2 (revenge) ANOVA on these two indexes, respectively. In both cases, we only found a main effect of revenge. Participants in the displaced revenge condition experienced more remorse ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.18$), $F(1, 271) = 110.25$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .30$, and more anger ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 2.65$), $F(1, 271) = 6.38$, $p = .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$, compared to participants in the no revenge condition ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 0.92$).

⁵ The other five factors were labeled *rumination*, *guilt*, *happiness*, *closure* and *anger*. Items of each scale are displayed in Appendix B. Reliability of all scales was satisfying (Cronbach's $\alpha \geq .75$, $r_s \geq .41$). For exploratory purposes, we investigated the effect of our feedback manipulation on these variables by using the same contrasts as for the main analyses. Interestingly, we found that rumination was lower in the understanding offender-and-target condition and understanding offender condition compared to the understanding target condition, no understanding condition and no feedback condition, $t(116) = 2.14$, $p = .04$, $d = 0.4$. In addition, we found that rumination in the understanding offender-and-target condition

was lower compared to the remaining four conditions, $t(116) = 2.01$, $p = .047$, $d = 0.5$. Thus, participants thought less about whether they should have reacted differently when the offender and the target together or solely the offender reflected understanding in their feedback. Taken together, results on rumination provide evidence for the offender understanding hypothesis as well as the offender-and-target understanding hypothesis. On the other scales we did not find any consistent pattern of results. At first sight, these findings might seem puzzling, however, because revenge reactions ultimately aim at re-establishing a sense of justice (e.g., Skarlicki & Folger, 1997), feelings of justice-related satisfaction are perhaps the best indicator that a certain revenge goal has been reached.

Table 1

Manipulation Check for Study 2: Effect of Condition on Perceived Understanding Signaled by Offender and Other Group Members

Condition	Measure	
	Perceived Understanding	Perceived Understanding
	Offender	Other Group Members
(a) Understanding Offender- and-Target	2.78 (1.93)	2.78 (1.81)
(b) Understanding Perpetrator	2.43 (1.67)	2.04 (1.26)
(c) Understanding Target	2.05 (1.47)	2.80 (1.82)
(d) No Understanding	1.46 (1.04)	1.50 (1.10)
(e) No Feedback	2.00 (1.02)	2.38 (0.98)

Note. Means and standard deviations (in parentheses). Response scales range from 1 to 6.

Table 2*Mean Values on Justice-Related Satisfaction by Condition (Study 2).*

Condition	<i>M(SD)</i>	Contrast	T
(a) Understanding Offender and Target	2.57(1.17)	Offender-and-Target Understanding Hypothesis: a vs. b, c, d, e	2.27*
(b) Understanding Offender	2.04(0.88)	Offender Understanding Hypothesis: a, b vs. c, d, e	1.47
(c) Understanding Target	1.99(1.16)	Vicarious Understanding Hypothesis: a, b, c vs. d, e	0.77
(d) No Understanding	1.94(0.91)	d vs. e	0.83
(e) No Feedback	2.17 (0.91)		
Total	2.14(1.01)		

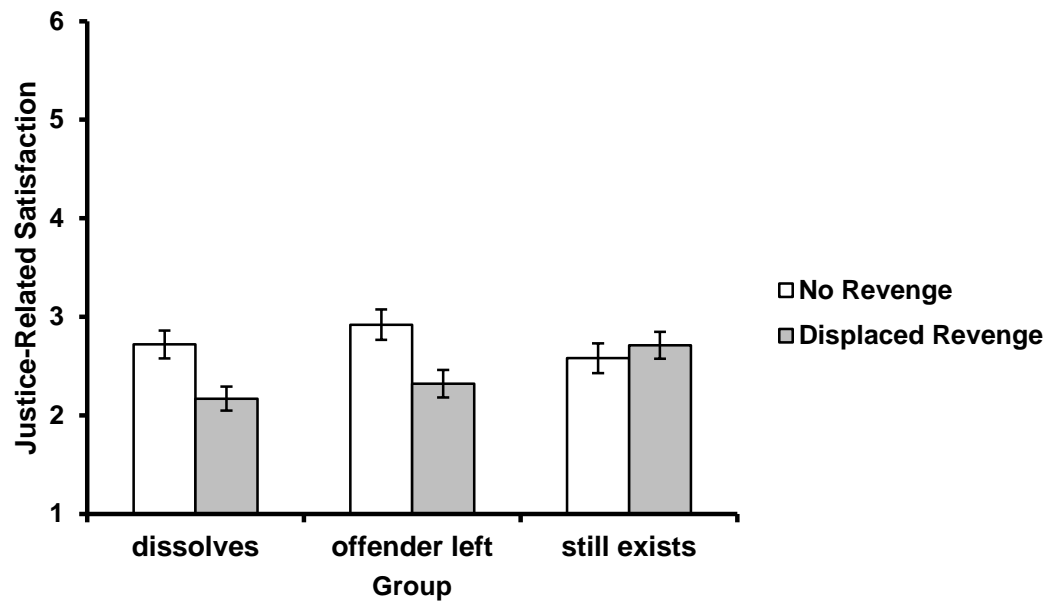
Note. Means and standard deviations (in parentheses). Response scales range from 1 to 6.

* $p < .05$

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Mean values on satisfaction by group permanence and displaced revenge (Study 1).

Capped vertical lines denote standard errors of means.



Appendix A

Items used in Study 1 and 2. Items with an asterisk (*) were only used in Study 2.

- Joy
- Anger
- Contentment
- Fury
- Guilt
- Relief
- Hate
- Pride
- Fear
- Satisfaction
- Shame
- Dissatisfaction
- Outrage*
- I think that justice now has been restored.
- I feel bad.
- I think whether I should have reacted differently.
- I wish it turned out differently.
- I think now that I can close this chapter.
- I think that I now can concentrate on other things.
- I feel satisfied with how things worked out.
- Justice has been served.*
- I think that everybody got what they deserved.*
- I feel satisfaction.*

Appendix B

Table B1: Rotated Factor Loading Matrix for Dependent Variables in Study 1.

Item	Factor		
	Justice-Related Satisfaction	Remorse	Anger
Contentment	0.80		
Joy	0.78		
Satisfaction	0.76		
Relief	0.70		
I feel satisfied with how things worked out.	0.61		
I think that justice has now been restored.	0.58		
Pride	0.52		
I think now that I can close this chapter.	0.47		
Guilt		0.91	
Shame		0.91	
I feel bad.		0.89	
I think whether I should have reacted differently.		0.72	
Fear		0.66	
I wish it turned out differently.		0.49	
Dissatisfaction		0.49	-.37
I think that I now can concentrate on other things.		-0.43	
Fury			-0.86
Hate			-0.76
Anger			-0.61

Note. Factor loadings $\leq .30$ are not displayed. Pride was not included in the justice-related satisfaction scale due to theoretical considerations.

Table B2. Rotated Factor Loading Matrix for Dependent Variables in Study 2.

Item	Factor					
	Justice- Related Satisfact ion	Ruminat ion	Guilt	Happine ss	Closure	Anger
Justice has been served.	.95					
I think that everybody got what they deserved.	.70					
Justice has been restored.	.64					
I feel satisfaction.	.64					
I think whether I should have reacted differently.		.76				
I wish it turned out differently.		.62				.31
I feel bad.		.37	.37			
Shame			.78			
Guilt			.70			
Fear			.52			
Joy				.82		
Contentment				.72		
Relief				.53		
Satisfaction	.31			.50		
I think that I now can concentrate on other things.					.69	
I think now that I can close this chapter.					.66	
Fury						.91
Anger						.81
Outrage						.76

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Dissatisfaction			.53
Hate	.34		.46
I feel satisfied with how things worked out.		.33	-.40
Pride			

Note. Factor loadings $\leq .30$ are not displayed. The factor loading of “pride” was $\geq .30$.

Appendix C

Detailed Procedure of the Punishment-IAT (Study 2)

Initial instructions of the punishment test read as follows:

In recent years, the phenomenon of “punishment” received increasing attention from science. In cooperative situations, it might be the case, that participants felt unjustly treated. However, many people are not aware of their desire to punish, why they cannot provide valid information. Therefore a reliable and validated test was developed, which enables us to indirectly measure such punishment desires. Results of previous studies show that about 90% of our participants at least felt a latent desire for punishment, after being treated unfairly.

Instructions further stated that the punishment test consisted of different sub-tasks in which participants have to identify as quickly as possible a particular word that would appear on their computer screen. Beforehand, participants were informed that depending on the results of the punishment test one of the other participants would receive an additional task. This task is to look at nine unpleasant images which were taken from the International Affective Picture System (IAPS; Lang, Bradley, & Cuthbert, 2008) and to create a description for each of the images. Following this instruction, the actual test begins.

In the first task of the test, participants were informed that that ten words would appear in random order on the computer screen, one of which were words related to “self” (e.g., I, SELF) or “others” (e.g., YOU, OTHERS). Participants were instructed to respond as quickly as possible by pushing a specified left-hand key (i.e., the “A”) when an “other”-related word appears and to respond as quickly as possible by pushing a specified right-hand key (i.e., the “6”) when a “self”-related word appears. In the second task, again 10 words appeared on the screen, 5 of which possessed a positive valence (e.g., reconciliation, forgive) and 5 of which have a negative valence (e.g., revenge, injustice). Instructions stated that the left-hand key should be pushed as quickly as possible when a positive word appeared on the screen, and the

right-hand key should be pushed as quickly as possible when a negative word appeared on the screen. The third task instructed participants to respond as quickly as possible by pushing the left-hand key when either a negative or “others” word appeared on the screen and by pushing the right-hand key when either a negative word or an “other” word appeared on the screen. Finally, the fourth task instructed participants to respond as quickly as possible by pushing the left-hand key when either a positive word or “other” appeared on the screen and by pushing the right-hand key when either a negative word or “self” word appeared on the screen.

After participants completed this task, the rationale for the test was explained. They were told that it is an implicit test that measures “automatic associations” via reaction times and that the faster people react, the stronger the association is. Participants were informed that this measure has often been used and validated (i.e., exhibits correlations with several physiological, emotional and behavioral measures that also tend to be correlated with punishment desires). Following these information, participants received feedback on their alleged test results. They were led to believe that the test revealed that they had responded faster (567 ms on average) in the third task, in which they were asked to respond with the same key to negative words and others, than in the fourth task, in which they were asked to respond with the same key to positive words and others (734 ms on average).

5 FINAL DISCUSSION

The present Dissertation integrates, both conceptually and empirically, research on direct revenge and research on group-based retribution in order to explore the dynamics underlying displaced revenge. For this endeavor, the contextual conditions under which displaced revenge may elicit justice-related satisfaction in avengers were examined across different samples and methodological approaches (viz. vignettes, retrospective reporting, and laboratory experiments). The five studies reported here provide novel evidence that revenge against innocent targets can lead to the experience of satisfaction and re-established justice. In summary, they show that displaced revenge is more satisfying for avengers when (a) the target and the original offender belong to a highly entitative group; more precisely a group whose members are interactive and similar in appearance, (b) the offender's group continues to exist in its original form, and (c) when both, the original offender and the displaced target understand why revenge was taken. Taken together, the present work suggests that displaced revenge aims at sending a message to the offender and the target of revenge.

The succeeding sections are devoted to a critical discussion of the present findings, covering the methodology (Section 5.1), reflections on conceptual issues (Section 5.2) as well as potential avenues for future research (Section 5.3). Finally, implications of this research for disparate domains will be outlined (Section 5.4).

5.1 Methodological Discussion

5.1.1 Manipulation of Revenge

Four studies sought to manipulate “revenge” in an experimental fashion assigning participants randomly either to a *direct*, *displaced*, or *no revenge*-condition or, alternatively, held “revenge” constant (i.e., all participants were assigned to one displaced revenge group). In prior research on the hedonic benefits of revenge, participants were free to decide whether

they take revenge or not (e.g., Funk et al., 2014; Gollwitzer & Denzler, 2009). In these studies, for example, the formation of the *revenge*- or *no revenge*-condition was based on participants' own decision to take revenge or not. Freedom to take revenge, however, can raise great concerns about internal validity. Although findings of Study 3 (Manuscript #1) and Gollwitzer et al. (2011) suggest that certain justice-related personality traits did not influence the decision to take revenge, it cannot be fully ruled out that avengers and non-avengers systematically differ with regard to other characteristics that might explain differences in justice-related satisfaction scores. In addition, and more pragmatically, the free choice to take revenge or not, usually results in low revenge frequencies (see, e.g., Funk et al., 2014). The number of avengers is supposed to be even lower when revenge is directed against a target that is not the original harm-doer. To address these problems and manipulate revenge experimentally, two different strategies were employed: First, scenario studies were used in which participants were asked to assume the role of the protagonist and imagine taking revenge (Studies 1, 2, and 4). Second, a false feedback about participants' desire to take revenge was provided, letting participants believe that they harbor vengeful desires (Study 5). These two methodological approaches shall be scrutinized in the following.

Hypothetical scenarios (e.g., vignettes or retrospective reports) are frequently used to investigate potentially destructive and socially undesirable behaviors like revenge, in particular, due to lower ethical concerns (see, e.g., Gollwitzer, 2005; Cota-McKinley, Woody, & Bell, 2001; Stenstrom et al., 2008). The use of scenarios, moreover, enables the manipulation of discrete factors (e.g., type of revenge, degree of entitativity) while holding a body of information constant. However, results obtained from scenario studies need to be interpreted cautiously with regard to their generalizability to real-life situations. One prominent criticism levelled against scenario methodology is that it gives, if any, only a weak indication of how people would react if the situation actually occurred in real life. Thus, what people report to feel in a hypothetical scenario might be different from what they feel if the

depicted situation actually occurred. To relax these concerns and make it easier for participants to relate themselves to the respective scenario, situations were created which come close to participants' everyday life. Before entering the study, respondents therefore could choose an area of personal relevance (e.g., university life) for the scenario (Studies 1 and 4) or, alternatively, should recall and elaborate on a past personal experience which was complemented with further hypothetical information (Study 2). To what extent participants actually could immerse themselves into the situation is, of course, difficult to control. Results regarding a control item, however, suggest that they had no major difficulties in assuming the role of the protagonist as ratings were relatively high across these three studies ($M = 3.65$, response scale from 1 = *very difficult* to 5 = *very easy*) and above the theoretical scale's-mid-point of 3 ($ts \geq 7.00$, $ps < .001$, $ds \geq 0.46$). Importantly, the reported ability to adopt the role of the avenger did not depend on type (e.g., direct or displaced) of revenge ($Fs \leq 2.48$, $ps \geq .12$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$). More specifically, with regard to the construct validity of the dependent variable, one might argue that justice-related satisfaction in such scenarios only reflects a rather vague intuition of how people would have felt after revenge. However, recent research suggests that people are quite able to make correct predictions about how satisfying revenge can be, if certain features (e.g., type of offender's feedback) are highlighted (Funk et al., 2014). Thus, people seem to take the influence of certain circumstances on affective and justice-related outcomes into account and hence are able to make quite valid judgments about how satisfying revenge may be (see also General Discussion in Manuscript #1). The present work sought to alleviate problems that are usually associated with the scenario methodology to yield a better indication of how participants would feel if the depicted situation actually occurred to them. Altogether, it seems that, by and large, participants were able to immerse themselves in the respective scenario. Nevertheless, to further strengthen our conclusions, we assessed participants' experience of satisfaction in response to a real-world act of displaced revenge in a laboratory paradigm (Studies 3 and 5).

A second possibility to manipulate or assign all participants to one revenge-condition is the use of a false feedback on people's desire to take revenge. In Study 5, participants were provided with such a false feedback on their vengeful desires after an unfair distribution of lottery tickets. They were asked to complete a bogus short-version of the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998), which was introduced as an objective and reliable measure of vengeful desires. After completion of this "punishment IAT," all participants received a fake feedback according to which they harbor vengeful desires (see Manuscript #2 for the detailed procedure). The false feedback procedure was taken and modified from the related research domain on forgiveness, which successfully used a similar technique to manipulate whether a person forgave an offender (see Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer, 2003; Luchies, Finkel, Kashamiro, & McNulty, 2010; Orth, Berking, Walker, Meier, & Znoj, 2008). Unfortunately, participants seem to question the veracity of the punishment IAT feedback on their vengeful desires. Critically, if people did not actually believe that they unconsciously decided to take revenge, the act of displaced revenge actually would have been unrelated to the obtained effects (of offender/target understanding). Put differently, revenge would not have been a necessary prerequisite for the effects found in Study 5. However, participants' low explicit agreement with the fake-results could likely be explained in terms of reactance (Brehm, 1966) or impression management (e.g., Jones & Pittman, 1982). Thus, participants might perhaps simply be reluctant to admit their vengeful desires. In order to minimize participants' skepticism, it is therefore important that false feedback procedures are integrated into the research paradigm in a natural fashion. Moreover, to examine whether reactance or impression management-based responses obscured participants' explicit ratings, actual vengeful desires following the feedback could perhaps be measured more indirectly.

Altogether, the present set of studies employed different methodological approaches to study (displaced) revenge in an experimental fashion. Results largely correspond across these

different techniques, thereby providing converging evidence on the relationship of entitativity and satisfaction as well as the importance of offender and target feedback on satisfaction.

5.1.2 Generalizability to Contexts Involving Larger Groups

In all five studies small- to medium-sized offender groups were used, such as a group of friends, fellow students, or a company department. One might therefore question to what extent the present findings can actually be generalized to situations involving larger groups as targets and which role vengeful desires play in decision-making in these contexts. First, one might be concerned whether inferences about within-group interactions (and communication) and hence (a) beliefs about other members' causal role in the offender's action and (b) the perceived chance that a revenge message can be spread, also come into effect in acts of displaced revenge against large groups. In large groups like companies or global organizations, members usually have a rather distant relation to each other and less face-to-face contact, which reduces the opportunities for actual personal interaction and communication. However, mutual interaction and communication in large, complex groups, nevertheless, takes place, but is typically mediated by formal communication networks or the media. More importantly, group size is not directly related to perceptions of entitativity (Lickel et al., 2000) and, thus, entitativity-related beliefs and inferences. In fact, observers tend to apply ideas of indirect causality even to social categories in which members did not know each other let alone interact directly with each other (Denson et al., 2006). Thus, in large groups the perceived extent to which members engage in interaction and communication as well as the inferences drawn from it may not differ *per se* from small- to medium-sized groups. The present findings might therefore—to a certain extent—be generalizable to displaced revenge against larger groups.

Second, one might question which role displaced revenge actually plays in large-scale conflicts or wars. It is undeniable that decisions, for instance, in international conflicts are

guided and shaped by strategic and political concerns of the leaders and elites involved (consider, for example, the international relations approach to deterrence strategy; e.g., Schelling, 1980). Although leaders' decisions to enforce punitive policies or wage war can be rooted in their own vengeful desires, they usually tend to limit the influence of these desires on their decision-making (Lieberman, 2014). However, vengeful desires likely shape rank-and-file members attitudes toward punitive actions (e.g., military actions, economic sanctions). For example, Americans' public support for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was strongly linked to desires to avenge the 9/11 terrorist attacks by Al-Qaeda terrorists (Lieberman & Skitka, 2008). Vengeful desires may therefore influence decisions for certain policies often rather indirectly. Since governments and political leaders—especially in democratic states—are highly dependent on the public's support for their policies, they have strong incentives to avoid policies that are unpopular and support those who gain widespread support (Lieberman, 2006; 2014; see also Carlsmith & Sood, 2009). Thus, although large-scale conflicts are often guided by strategic decisions, vengeful desires may indirectly come into play.

In summary, it seems reasonable to assume that the dynamics investigated here with small- to medium-sized groups are also at work in displaced revenge against larger groups. Future research should, nevertheless, explicitly consider group size and group structure to account for the situational forces that come into effect in more complex situations involving larger groups.

5.1.3 Justice-Related Satisfaction as a Dependent Variable

The central dependent variable in this Dissertation is justice-related satisfaction after displaced revenge. In the following it shall be scrutinized to what extent a self-reported measure can give us an insight into avengers' underlying revenge goals. Relatedly, it will be discussed whether the present findings are specific to justice-related satisfaction.

5.1.3.1 Justice-Related Satisfaction as an Indicator of Goal Fulfillment

Research on goal pursuit has shown that positive affect is an important indicator of conscious (e.g., Atkinson, 1957; Heckhausen, 1977) as well as unconscious goal fulfillment (e.g., Chartrand, 2002; Chartrand & Bargh, 2002). With regard to the present studies, this implies that as soon as the goal underlying displaced revenge (e.g., punishing a quasi-offender or sending a message) is fulfilled, avengers should experience feelings of relief and satisfaction. Importantly, avengers themselves do not need to be aware of or able to specify the “real” goal. Given that revenge actions ultimately aim at re-establishing a sense of subjective justice (e.g., Adams, 1965; McLean Parks, 1997; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997), avengers’ satisfaction after revenge may therefore be interpreted as an indicator that a certain revenge goal has been achieved. In this way, the present thesis is strongly linked to previous research investigating the affective consequences of goal-attainment in revenge episodes (Funk et al., 2014; Gollwitzer et al., 2011).

However, one should note that this measure only allows indirect inferences about avengers’ revenge goals and should therefore be cautiously interpreted. For example, explicitly asking for justice-related satisfaction entails the risk of post-hoc rationalization by participants. Since revenge is highly susceptible to impression concerns (e.g., Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2006), avengers may rationalize their vengeful behavior afterwards by agreeing with the item that “now justice is being restored” or “everybody got what they deserve” in order to justify that they are moral or acted the right way. In this case, participants’ responses would not indicate true feelings of justice-related satisfaction or goal fulfillment. The tendency to rationalize one’s own behavior post-hoc should be pronounced, when one was free to decide how to act (Study 3) or, at least, had the illusion to do so (Study 5). Rationalization tendencies, by contrast, should be less likely in situations in which people were not free to decide whether to take revenge. Without freedom of choice, participants do not necessarily have to rely on such strategies to see themselves as right or moral. Converging evidence

across different methodological approaches and paradigms in which participants could not freely chose to take revenge was provided by the present research. Therefore, such a rationalization explanation for the obtained results could, at least, be partially weakened.

Nevertheless, in order to further rule out this alternative explanation one can resort to unobtrusive measures and examine the cognitive consequences of goal fulfillment. Social and cognitive psychological theories propose that goal attainment is characterized by a heightened accessibility of goal-related concepts, which is functional in a sense that it contributes to goal fulfillment (e.g., Liberman & Förster, 2005). As the heightened accessibility loses its functionality once a goal has been fulfilled, goal fulfillment is followed by an inhibition of goal-related constructs (e.g., Förster, Liberman, & Higgins, 2005; Marsh, Hicks, & Bink, 1998). For example, prior research on revenge operationalized goal-related constructs as aggression-related words. As illustrated above, this research demonstrates that the accessibility of aggression-related words in a lexical decision task decreased after successful enactment of revenge (Denzler et al., 2009; Gollwitzer & Denzler, 2009). It is important to mention, however, that (1) the results found in studies with self-reports of satisfaction (e.g., Funk et al., 2014; Gollwitzer et al., 2011) converged with those using more unobtrusive measures of goal fulfillment, and (2) accessibility-based measures like the lexical decision task tend to produce high levels of noise (Diependaele, Brysbaert, & Neri, 2012). Thus, accessibility-based measures or, more generally, implicit measures enable an indirect measurement of goal fulfillment, but should be cautiously interpreted due to their rather low reliability. However, future work might benefit from using such a cognitive measure of goal fulfillment to more directly assess the motivational dynamics of displaced revenge. It would be moreover interesting to study the interplay of the cognitive and affective consequences of goal fulfillment. For example, to clarify the consequences of successful revenge on future revenge it may prove useful to consider the short- and long-term effects of revenge on both cognitive and affective measures. Heightened arousal as an immediate consequence of

successful revenge may perhaps function as a cue for unresolved goal-attainment and, thereby, keep the wounds open and fuel the desire for further displaced revenge (cf. Denzler & Förster, 2012).

5.1.3.2 Specificity of the Present Findings to Justice-Related Satisfaction

The results reported in Manuscript #1 and #2 are conclusive with regard to justice-related satisfaction, whereas no consistent evidence regarding other post-revenge outcomes, such as regret about revenge could be observed. Intuitively, this finding seems somewhat puzzling as one may assume that an increase in positive feelings (i.e., justice-related satisfaction) comes along with a decrease in negative feelings (e.g., regret). Does it mean that displaced revenge tastes sweet, but not less bitter? As one would expected, medium to high negative correlations between justice-related satisfaction and regret can be found across the three studies in Manuscript #1 and a comparable correlation pattern was found between satisfaction and our exploratory variables (e.g., rumination, happiness) in Manuscript #2. However, given that revenge is strongly related to victim's subjective sense of justice (e.g., Bies & Tripp, 1996; Cropanzano et al., 2003), justice-related satisfaction is perhaps more sensitive to changes in factors that facilitate or signal the achievement of that goal and, therefore, may be the best indicator for successful revenge. In that sense, justice-related satisfaction could be seen as a specific emotional response to successful revenge, just like, for example, disgust is a specific emotional response to purity violations (Horberg, Oveis, Keltner, & Cohen, 2009).

Furthermore, it might be particularly difficult for participants to report feelings of regret in response to vengeful actions involving innocent targets. Regret describes a complex emotional experience that stems from and produces higher order cognitive processes (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007). Given the basic norm not to harm innocent people, participants may therefore feel obliged to express regret after displaced revenge. Especially items like "I

wonder whether I should have reacted differently” or “I wish it all had turned out differently” might raise social desirability concerns which obfuscate the effects of the experimental manipulations. In this case, participants would report to feel regretful, even though they actually do not feel so. In addition, the reliability of the regret measure in Studies 2 and 3 was admittedly not satisfying (Study 2: $\alpha = .61$; Study 3: $\alpha = .50$), which may reduce the power to detect a potential effect.

Taken together, it makes intuitive sense to assume that the effects on satisfaction observed here are diametrically opposed to negative outcomes (e.g., regret). The present empirical evidence, however, is not consistent with this assumption. At the moment it is therefore difficult to say, whether these results are indeed specific to justice-related satisfaction, that is, whether displaced revenge only has an effect on satisfaction, but not on other emotional outcomes. Future research should thoroughly conceptualize and implement different facets of post-revenge outcomes to get a better insight into the intra-psychic consequences of successful displaced revenge. For example, exploratory analyses in Study 5 (see Appendix of Manuscript #2) suggest that our feedback manipulation affected the extent to which avengers ruminate about the incident. These results may indicate that perhaps certain factors such as offender or target feedback have distinct effects on different outcomes.

5.2 Conceptual Discussion Points

5.2.1 Entitativity as a Cause or Consequence of Displaced Revenge?

In the present research, entitativity was considered as an independent variable, which was either varied (in Studies 1 to 3) or held constant (in Studies 4 and 5). One might justifiably argue that entitativity is not a true independent variable insofar as perceptions of entitativity themselves are subject to change in response to displaced revenge or, more generally, the presence and history of a conflict (Lickel, 2012). Undoubtedly, perceived entitativity is shaped by group-based conflicts, at least in two ways: First, seeing the opposing

group as tightly-knit serves as a strategic justification to cast a wider net around the offender and retaliate against the entire group (i.e., one tends to see what one wants to see). In particular, highly identified group members are prone to such motivated reasoning within conflicts to legitimize retaliation against individuals of the opposing group beyond actual offenders (Stenstrom et al., 2008). Second, attacks against members of the offender's group may in fact mold group members into one cohesive unit (see Fisher, 2006). For example, individuals are more strongly attracted to their group and likely seek support from other group members in the face of threat (Castano & Yzerbyt, 1998). Hence, displaced revenge against members of a group actually increases the target group's cohesiveness.

Altogether, it is undeniable that entitativity can and should also be considered as a dependent variable in group-based conflicts. To fully understand the emergence and perpetuation of conflicts, however, it is of major concern to study the effects of group entitativity *on* displaced revenge. As mentioned before, entitativity is not only the product of people's perception of a group, but it is, of course, strongly based on the actual cohesiveness of a group (Hamilton, 2007; Zyphur & Islam, 2006; see Section 1.2.1.1). In rivalries or conflict situations members of opposing parties (e.g., sport teams, armies) frequently manifest cues that reflect their high level of cohesiveness. For example, military platoons display organization and coordination (e.g., marching in the same direction) as well as visual uniformity (e.g., wearing uniforms). Perceptions of entitativity are therefore inevitably rooted in actual features of a group, which, in turn, guide our behavior toward members of this group.

In sum, it is quite reasonable that entitativity functions as both—a cause *and* a consequence of displaced revenge. Initial perceptions of entitativity may instigate negative responses toward targets beyond actual offenders. Subsequent counter-reactions from the offender group may then amplify the initial perceptions of entitativity and foster negative evaluations of the entire offender group, which, in turn, justifies and strengthens further

atrocities against all members of that group. Future research should consider both roles of entitativity in order to fully understand the development, perpetuation, and escalation of violent group conflicts.

5.2.2 How do Similarity and Interaction Relate to Displaced Revenge?

Similarities between individuals as well as interactions among individuals can evoke perceptions of entitativity (Ip et al., 2006). However, in this Dissertation it was reasoned that perceived interaction is probably more potent than perceived similarity in eliciting justice-related satisfaction in avengers after displaced revenge (see Section 1.3.2). This reasoning is based on previous evidence that interaction is a stronger predictor of overall entitativity and the notion that a central goal underlying displaced revenge is to send a message to the offender and other members of the offender's group, which is more likely when group members frequently interact with each other. Contrary to this assumption, Study 3 shows that the offender's group has to be perceived as interactive *and* similar to elicit feelings of satisfaction.

Thus, the question arises how similarity and interaction exactly relate to avenger's post-revenge satisfaction. In light of the present results, it may be conceivable that only the interplay of both similarity and interaction actually increases the chances that a message embedded in displaced revenge can be delivered to *and* understood by other members. As argued above, perceptions of interaction may be more relevant as to whether a potential revenge message can be disseminated within the offender's group and eventually delivered to the offender and other members. By contrast, superficial similarities may indicate how likely it is that the offender (or other group members) actually complies with this revenge message. Research on direct revenge highlights the aspect that the revenge message entails a prompt for the offender to change his attitudes and behavior toward the victim (Funk et al., 2014). Displaced revenge alike might aim at affecting such a change (see Section 5.3.1 for a more

detailed discussion of this idea). In this sense, fellow group members are perhaps seen as particularly effective in causing such a change, especially when they are perceived as similar to the original offender. Research on social influence, for example, has shown that receivers are more likely to be persuaded by a message, if this message is delivered by a source that is similar to themselves (e.g., Berscheid, 1966; Brock, 1965; Mackie, Worth, & Asuncion, 1990). Since group members who are perceived as superficially similar, are also believed to share similarities on other dimensions like characteristics and properties (e.g., Rothbart & Taylor, 1992), avengers may, indeed, believe that revenge is more effective if the message is delivered by a person that looks similar to the actual offender (i.e., the target). Thus, the combination of both perceived similarity and interaction would present the necessary condition whereby displaced revenge actually increases the chances that a message is effectively delivered to and understood by other members of the offender's group.

It should be noted that in real world contexts, groups do not always share perceptual similarities (e.g., uniforms or jerseys) and instead are quite heterogeneous in their appearance. In light of the above reasoning, one might therefore question whether displaced revenge against such groups can actually be satisfying. According to the findings by Ip et al. (2006), for example, interaction is also related to perceptions of psychological similarity, albeit weaker than superficial similarity. In addition, it seems likely that once individuals are categorized into one group (e.g., based on certain labels), observers may start to infer similarities among members (e.g., Foroni & Rothbart, 2011). Thus, in real-world group perception, offender groups perhaps do not necessarily have to display perceptual similarity to make displaced revenge a satisfying experience.

The present findings only scratched the surface of the similarity-interaction distinction. Therefore, the precise role of similarity and interaction in displaced revenge remains largely subject to speculation at this stage. However, results suggest that a closer analysis of similarity and interaction can provide important insights into entitativity

perceptions and the complex dynamics underlying displaced revenge. Future research should assess the psychological implications and accompanying cognitions of perceived similarity and interaction to explore their distinct roles in displaced revenge.

5.2.3 Entitativity versus Categorization

A further point that deserves discussion is whether the present results actually reflect an effect of varying degrees of entitativity or whether they are rather an effect of mere categorization. With the manipulation of high and low entitativity in Studies 1 and 2, two points on the entitativity continuum were selected and operationalized. The operationalization of low entitativity, however, could perhaps also reflect single individuals rather than a real group. Accordingly, the manipulation of high and low entitativity would manipulate discrete categories (e.g., no-group vs. group) instead of varying degrees of entitativity. The differentiation between a dichotomous categorization-effect and a continuous entitativity-effect is important with regard to the question whether justice-related satisfaction increases depending on different states of perceived entitativity. Alternatively, one could argue that once individuals are psychologically grouped into a category, any increase in entitativity is no longer relevant for feelings of satisfaction. Hence, the mere categorization of people into one group would suffice to make displaced revenge satisfying. This question is not explicitly addressed by our two-level entitativity manipulation in Study 1 and 2. Study 3, in which we manipulated different antecedents of entitativity (i.e., similarity and interaction), nevertheless, may provide a closer look at the nature of this effect. For example, one could expect that varying degrees of entitativity (e.g., low, moderate, high) were operationalized by the orthogonal manipulation of similarity and interaction. If different degrees of entitativity were operationalized, this could potentially allow for a test of these two assumptions (i.e., categorization vs. entitativity). However, manipulation checks revealed that similarity and interaction were not additive components that linearly add to perceptions of entitativity (see

entitativity manipulation check of Study 3, Manuscript #1). Thus, the independent manipulation of similarity and interaction does not translate into varying degrees of entitativity. By contrast, perceptual similarity should rather provide sufficient information to group individuals into one category even irrespective of mutual interaction, as categories can be defined as “*psychological objects that are grouped together on the basis of their perceptual similarities*” (Corneille & Judd, 1999; p. 927). Similarities among individuals indicated by shirt color in Study 3 thus should actually suffice to categorize those participants into one group (see also Wilder, 1986). Therefore, if it would be the mere effect of categorization, no differences in justice-related satisfaction should actually be observed between the three conditions in Study 3 in which, at least, superficial similarities between members or interaction were given (i.e., *low similarity/strong interaction; high similarity/weak interaction; high similarity/strong interaction*). However, the only difference in justice-related satisfaction was found between the *high similarity/strong interaction* condition and the remaining three conditions.

Additionally, this question can perhaps be indirectly addressed with the control data on entitativity perceptions. For example, in Study 2 in which we explicitly manipulated overall entitativity and demonstrated its effect on satisfaction, participants rated the extent to which they perceive the offender’s group to be entitative in the manipulation check. If satisfaction after displaced revenge gradually increases with perceptions of entitativity, this may suggest that satisfaction depends on the perceived level of entitativity. For this purpose, justice-related satisfaction was regressed on participants’ entitativity ratings. Results reveal that entitativity was positively linearly related to satisfaction in the displaced revenge conditions, $\beta = .42$, $SE = .20$, $t(41) = 2.90$, $p < .01$.

In sum, there is tentative evidence that the present findings are not only the result of a mere categorization process into non-group vs. group. Categorization may be a prerequisite, but to make displaced revenge satisfying it seems to be necessary that the offender’s group is

also perceived as entitative (see also Lickel et al., 2006). Future research should address the nature of the present effect explicitly to differentiate the effects of entitativity above categorization more rigorously, for example, by using an additional no group-condition.

5.2.4 Displaced Revenge as Just Deserts or Deterrence?

The plethora of research in social psychology adopted the philosophical distinction between retributive (e.g., giving offenders their just deserts) and utilitarian (e.g., deterrence of further offenses) goals as the conceptual framework to study punishment goals (see, e.g., Carlsmith, 2006; Carlsmith et al., 2002). The retributivist approach (Kant, 1797/1990) primarily looks backward to the wrongfulness of the offense committed, whereas the utilitarian approach (Bentham, 1830/2008) looks forward to the potential outcomes of punishment. Given the significance of these two perspectives within the psychological literature on punishment goals, one might ask how the present results can be interpreted within this conceptual framework.

As argued in Manuscript #2, the present results cannot solely be explained by a retributivist stance, according to which avengers would simply seek to impose just deserts upon the target (see Section 1.3.3). If displaced revenge was primarily about giving targets their just deserts, understanding from the offender or target should not matter once the specific goal (i.e., punishment of a quasi-offender) is achieved. Similarly, it should not be relevant whether the original offender left the group, as long as the quasi-offender receives his or her deserved punishment. However, Studies 4 and 5 speak against an a purely retributive motive by demonstrating that displaced revenge elicits more justice-related satisfaction when (a) the offender stays in his or her group and (b) the offender and the target link the act of revenge to the offender's prior behavior. Of course, this analysis focusses on one particular aspect of the retributivist account (i.e., retrospective orientation), whereas others like the proportionality of punishment are not explicitly considered. Nevertheless, the pattern of

results obtained here makes an exclusive retributive motive underlying displaced revenge rather unlikely.

According to a utilitarian perspective, displaced revenge should be satisfying because entitativity indicates that retaliating against any member of the offender's group actually deters victimization by any other of them in the future (cf. McCullough, Kurzban, & Tabak, 2010; 2013). This notion was not explicitly addressed in the present research, but victims may perhaps infer from the understanding feedback used in Study 5 that the offender and the target are now less likely to commit similar offenses in the future. In that sense, it would be the implicit promise not to victimize the avenger again that made displaced revenge actually satisfying. To examine whether displaced revenge serves primarily to prevent further victimizations, it may perhaps prove informative to include opportunities for further interaction with the offender group in future research.

Taken together, the present research on displaced revenge cannot clearly be mapped onto the retributive-utilitarian framework. Results rather speak against purely retributive motives and cannot provide conclusive evidence for utilitarian (e.g., deterrence) motives. In this vein, it is noteworthy that whereas utilitarian and retributive concerns are seen as conceptually distinct, they cannot be clearly empirically separated (cf. Oswald, Hupfeld, Klug, & Gabriel, 2002; Orth, 2003). However, if one alternatively conceives revenge as a message, the conceptual corset of the retributive-utilitarian dichotomy can perhaps be loosened and revenge can rather be interpreted as both (see Funk et al., 2014). The same may hold true for displaced revenge. In that sense, displaced revenge can be backward-looking and concerned with the wrongness of the behavior of the specific offender and perhaps the perceived complicity of other members in communicating how wrong their behavior was. At the same time it can also be forward-looking and communicate the extent to which the offender and the target actually have to change their attitudes and behavior toward the victim.

In the next section, it will be elaborated in more detail on the idea that displaced revenge might aim at affecting a change in the offender and other members of the target group.

5.3 The Journey Continues: Directions for Future Research

The present findings raise some important further questions, which open intriguing tracks for future research. Most importantly, it should be examined in more detail what it exactly is about the feedback in Study 5 that makes displaced revenge satisfying in order get a more precise understanding of what victims actually hope to achieve by taking displaced revenge (5.3.1). Another issue of considerable importance is what consequences displaced revenge may have in the course of a conflict. Therefore, the contextual factors that either lead to an escalation or perhaps de-escalation of conflict merit future research (5.3.2).

5.3.1 Is Displaced Revenge more than Sending a Message?

The present work builds on the idea that displaced revenge like direct revenge aims at sending a message (“don’t mess with me!”). In Study 5, understanding expressed by the offender and/or target was used as an indicator whether this revenge message has been successfully delivered. However, what else the understanding feedback of the offender and the target might have communicated to the victim cannot explicitly be answered with the present data. Consider, the feedback participants received only implied whether the offender and/or target realized that revenge was punishment for the offender’s prior behavior (e.g., *“think you gave me the picture task because Alex distributed the tickets so unfairly earlier on.”*). Thus, it is left to speculation whether it is solely the acknowledgment of the victim’s intent to take revenge or something more that brings satisfaction to victims. As mentioned above, recent research on revenge in interpersonal contexts gives rise to the notion that it is particularly a moral change in the offender’s attitudes that makes revenge eventually satisfying (Funk et al., 2014; see also Boon, Deveau, & Alibhai, 2009). This finding is in line with earlier psychological and philosophical accounts on punishment, according to which

punishment primarily serves to “educate” offenders (e.g., Heider, 1958; Morris, 1981). Thus, it seems not only to be the mere acknowledgement of the victim’s intent to punish, but the change that co-vibrates with the understanding feedback that makes revenge ultimately satisfying. By taking displaced revenge, victims may perhaps also want to affect a change in the offender’s/target’s attitudes and their subsequent behavior. In this vein, the expression of understanding by the offender and target in Study 5 may possibly be seen as a first step in initiating such a change. In this sense, Miller (2001) argued that “[...] *retaliation will be satisfying only to the extent that perpetrator shows evidence of being educated; minimally, this objective will require that the perpetrator knows why he or she is being punished*” (p. 541; see also Durkheim, 1964; Vidmar, 2001). It is left to future research to examine in more detail, whether avengers actually aim at affecting a change in the offender and target when taking displaced revenge. This could be realized, for example, by modifying the feedback from Funk et al. (2014) or by manipulating the subsequent behavior of the offender and target in a game-paradigm including the allocation of resources.

A further question that resonates with the discussion above is whether or how offenders can actually be prompted to change their attitudes without being directly punished by the victim. In an attempt to address this question, it is worth considering previous scholarly work on collective punishment. In this field, sociologists and legal scholars alike argue that fellow group members are in the position to monitor, control, and regulate their fellow group members’ behavior (Levinson, 2003; see also Heckathorn, 1988; 1990). In the same vein, Kahan (1997) states that “*the perception that one’s peers will or will not disapprove exerts a much stronger influence than does the threat of a formal sanction on whether a person decides to engage in a range of common offenses ...*” (p. 354). Therefore, other members of the offender’s group (e.g., the target of displaced revenge) are likely seen as particularly suited to initiate a change in offenders and other members of their group. This should apply especially to groups which reflect a high degree of mutual influence, which is likely the case

in highly entitative groups. Displaced revenge may thus be more satisfying against a target of a highly entitative group, because members of these groups are perceived as more likely to influence each other and eventually re-educate their fellow members (e.g., the original offender; see also the discussion on the combined effect of similarity and interaction in Section 5.2.2). Thus, if avengers really hope to affect a change in the offender and other members, displaced revenge against targets who can exercise greater influence on other members might be perceived as more effective and hence more satisfying. One might speculate, for example, whether revenge against a target of a group with an egalitarian (or democratic) structure is generally more satisfying than revenge against a lower status target of a hierarchical (or non-democratic) group (cf. Levinson, 2003). This reasoning moreover provides an insight into whether and when displaced revenge can possibly be more effective and satisfying than direct revenge. Revenge taken against target persons who can monitor and exert great influence on other members of their group like, for example, group leaders (e.g., Hogg, 2001), may be perceived as more effective compared to revenge taken against rank-and-file members.

5.3.2 Displaced Revenge and the Escalation of Violence

Whereas the present research focused on the question what avengers hope to achieve by revenge, it emerges to be a separate, albeit related issue, to what consequences displaced revenge may actually lead. Revenge taken against an innocent individual is probably seen as disproportionate and by no means justified, especially in the eyes of the offender's group (cf. Stillwell et al., 2008). Thus, displaced revenge likely breeds counter-revenge fueling reciprocal cycles of violence. However, punishing those group members who are not directly responsible for an offense might also be an effective mean to exercise influence and control on those who are principally responsible for the harm (Heckathorn, 1988; Levinson, 2003; see also Section 5.3.1) and perhaps reduce further violence. Therefore, it is important to explore

the factors under which displaced revenge is likely to backfire or perhaps likely to be effective in diminishing conflict. In the following, I will discuss certain factors that might decisively influence the consequences of displaced revenge or, more generally, the course of group-based conflicts.

First, to what extent displaced revenge is seen as illegitimate by members of the offender's group should strongly hinge on prevailing group norms. Norms serve as expected standards of behavior within a group or, more broadly, within social contexts. In particular, those who are highly identified with their group should be influenced by group norms (Terry & Hogg, 1996). If such norms are consonant with the offender's action against the victim, displaced revenge may be seen as particularly illegitimate and thus may likely lead to feelings of moral outrage and anger which, in turn, provoke counter-revenge. However, if the offender's action conflicts with the norms of the group, the offender's action is seen as a threat to one's social identity (i.e., part of one's identity derived from group-membership; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In this case, group members may try to avert further damage and enforce normative control on the offender. For example, research on the black sheep effect demonstrates that highly identified group members derogate deviant in-group members particularly harshly when their behavior violated group norms (e.g., Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988). Thus, displaced revenge may perhaps not necessarily beget excessive counter-revenge if the offender's action is seen as a violation of group norms.

Second, group leaders or authorities play a key role in group conflicts (e.g., Staub, 1989). They exert strong influence over their members and are capable to control the information flow between members (e.g., Hogg, 2001; see also De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2002; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002), especially in large groups in which members do not have face-to-face contact. Moreover, leaders are usually seen as prototypical for the group and as such embody the group identity (Hogg, 2001). These features let victims see leaders often as motivators behind attacks committed by other members. In fact, they are seen as

being more responsible than common group members for offenses committed by other members (Lickel et al., 2003). The reasoning of the preceding section moreover suggests that, if avengers indeed seek to re-educate the offender and perhaps other members, leaders could be perceived as particularly effective in promoting such a change in their followers. Thus, leaders may represent attractive targets of displaced revenge for several reasons. Critically, attacks on leaders, in turn, are experienced as extremely threatening to members and therefore likely elicit counter-responses by the target group (Lickel et al., 2006). Whether counter-revenge is actually advocated by leaders, seems to strongly depend on the stability of their own position. For example, strong leaders tend to use cooperative strategies in conflicts whereas weak leaders use aggressive means in order to consolidate their own status (Bekkers, 1977). Hence, weak leaders may likely mobilize counter-retaliation. Whereas, strong leaders perhaps seek more constructive solutions to resolve potential conflicts as they are not necessarily reliant on bolstering their own status within their group.

Third, revenge against a powerful target is less likely due to the greater risk of effective counter-revenge (Newheiser & Dovidio, 2014). Thus, whether a vengeful action is chosen probably depends on power-asymmetries between opponents. If the risk of becoming a victim oneself again is high, members may experience fear and counter-responses are less likely. For example, if the target of displaced revenge (or his group) is in a weaker position than the avenger, counter-revenge should be less likely. Whether revenge is actually taken in the first place, of course, also depends on the relative power of the victim. If victims (or targets) perceive themselves as weaker than the offender, they may (a) refrain from further revenge, (b) target a weaker individual of the offender's group, or (c) even displace their revenge toward related, albeit weaker target groups (see Ein-Dor & Hirschberger, 2012). Such a shift in revenge may quickly expand the conflict beyond the two initial opponent groups to other parties who were totally unrelated to the initial offense.

Fourth, research on interpersonal revenge has demonstrated that the presence of an audience (e.g., unrelated third-party) engenders vengeful behavior (Kim, Smith, & Brigham, 1998), likely due to reputational concerns (e.g., Tedeschi & Felson, 1994). Thus, third-parties seem to play a critical role in the escalation of conflicts. Whether the presence of an audience has an escalating effect or perhaps even lead to defuse a conflict, may depend on certain features of that audience, like their status or their relation to the opponents involved. For example, a high status group that has high justice-concerns or favors peaceful solutions may reduce the likelihood of displaced revenge and counter-revenge.

Before concluding this section, another key feature of group conflicts shall be briefly mentioned, that is, *vicarious revenge*. In conflicts often not only the offender is a member of a social group, but also the victim. Thus, it is often not the actual victim who takes revenge, but other members of the victim's group who "take up the reins" and avenge the harm on behalf of the victim. For an analysis of vicarious revenge it is indispensable to consider the interrelations within the victim's group, the strength of bonding and identification of members (Lickel et al., 2006; Stenstrom et al., 2008). When the offense against the victim is seen as an offense against the entire group and its values, fellow group members likely engage in vicarious revenge (see, e.g., Yzerbyt, Dumont, Wigboldus, & Gordijn, 2003). However, it emerges to be a separate issue whether vicarious revenge is actually capable to bring justice to victims. For example, if the self-ingroup overlap is high (Tropp & Wright, 2001), victims may perhaps feel that vicarious revenge sends a message to the offender(s) on their behalf, thereby leading to genuine satisfaction. To fully understand the dynamics underlying violent and often intractable conflicts, both types of revenge should not only be examined in isolation, but also in their interplay.

While not intended as an exhaustive list, this section presented different factors that seem to be of particular importance in better understanding conflict development, the effects of displaced revenge and counter-revenge. For the sake of conceptual clarification, these

processes were discussed in isolation. However, they are probably mutually supportive. For example, whether a strong leader prefers to advocate certain strategies is also influenced by normative pressures within the group. Therefore, it remains an important task for future research to examine the escalation and perpetuation of conflict as well as the affective and cognitive processes involved. Game-theoretic approaches seem to be particularly suited to elucidate the different stages in which conflicts may escalate. For instance, public good games in group environments with multiple punishment opportunities enable to investigate the consecutive escalation of conflicts (see, e.g., Fehr, Sommerfeld, Semmann, Krambeck, & Milinski, 2012). A further promising path is the use of immersive virtual reality environments. This technique could enable to model the complex dynamics of group-based retribution (i.e., displaced revenge and vicarious revenge) in a more realistic way combined with a high degree of experimental control.

5.4 Practical Implications

The following section delineates implications of the present findings on conceptual and empirical work in the field of terrorism and counter-terrorism and, more broadly, on practical measures of conflict management and reconciliation.

5.4.1 Displaced Revenge in the Context of Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism

The pervasiveness of terrorism is inarguably. Although, political and social conditions provide the breeding ground on which terrorism thrives, only a fraction of those people suffering certain conditions actually engage in terrorism (e.g., Friedland, 1988). Therefore, more needs to be known about when people get drawn into terrorism and, in particular, which social and psychological processes are involved (see Victoroff, 2005).

Vengeful desires are a strong driving force behind acts of terrorism or other violent conflicts (Waldmann, 2001). Crucially, the displacement of one's vengeful desires constitutes a central step on the path to terrorism (Moghaddam, 2005) and non-combatants are frequently

seen as viable targets of terrorist actions (Breckenridge & Zimbardo, 2007). For example, war victims in Chechnya began to believe that any member of the ethnic group whose members were responsible for the harm they suffered is a viable revenge target (Speckhard & Ahkmedova, 2006). These desires, in turn, made them susceptible to the recruitment in terrorist organizations which provide would-be-terrorists an outlet to channel their vengeful desires (e.g., McCullough, 2008). Despite the strong link between terrorism and revenge, social psychology has only recently started to consider direct and displaced revenge explicitly in the context of terrorism or counter-terrorism (e.g., Gollwitzer et al., 2014). Extending this line of research, the present work may diffuse into psychological research and theorizing on terrorism. For instance, although the displacement of one's vengeful desires is considered to play a central role in terrorism, the forces driving displaced revenge have previously been largely neglected (see, e.g., Moghaddam, 2005). Conceptualizing displaced revenge as a goal-directed behavior that aims at sending a message may therefore be fruitfully incorporated into previous work to obtain a broader conceptual framework explaining acts of terrorism and counter-terrorism. The present perspective on displaced revenge, for example, can help to render more precisely the conditions under which people suffering from injustice actually engage in terrorist actions, which targets are more likely to be attacked, and under which circumstances terrorists' vengeful desires are perhaps satisfied.

Furthermore, the present research can give us insights into how vengeful desires, in general, can be construed and exploited by leaders and elites to attract people for their own causes. Via media and propaganda, leaders can easily construe situations in a way that warrants them support for group-based retribution. For instance, portraying a rivaling group as highly entitative allows leaders to justify intergroup conflict and mobilize followers to support responses against entire groups. In this context, it is furthermore important to note that the "messages" intended to be conveyed by certain reprisals and the way they are perceived by others may diverge (Gray & Wilson, 2006). Thus, leaders and elites may not

only construe the initial event (e.g., the terror offense) to gather support for their policies, but may also frame their responses to this event (e.g., counter-terrorism) in a way that leads the public to actually believe that “justice can be served.”

A comprehensive analysis of displaced revenge actions within the context terrorism or the “war on terrorism” would definitely fall beyond the scope of this Dissertation, however, it should be demonstrated that the dynamics investigated here can be fruitfully applied to this field. Not least, can a better understanding of displaced revenge reactions in the context of terrorism be helpful to eventually tailor effective policies and strategies to combat terrorism.

5.4.2 Conflict Management and Reconciliation

This work provides a further mosaic stone in understanding group-based retribution. Ultimately, research on the features and dynamics of this phenomenon should provide insights into possible strategies to eventually alleviate the devastating consequences associated with displaced revenge. Based on the present findings, therefore, some practical recommendations for conflict management and reconciliation shall be formulated.

First, perceptions of entitativity do not only increase the likelihood of displaced revenge (e.g., Newheiser et al., 2012; Stenstrom et al., 2008), avengers are also more satisfied with revenge if the offender group is perceived to be entitative. Thus, it may prove particularly effective to educate against perceptions of high target group entitativity. For example, most, if not all, violent conflicts are characterized by a rhetoric which portrays the rivaling group as a strong, de-individuated, and cohesive unit (see Glover, 2001). Previous research suggests an interesting relation between the use of language and perceptions of entitativity (Rubini, Moscatelli, & Palmonari, 2007). In fact, using certain group labels will likely reinforce perceived entitativity of target groups (Smith, 2007). Thus, abandon or reduce a rhetoric portraying the offender’s group as “monolithic” and simultaneously promote perceptions of group variability may reduce the legitimization of displaced revenge, and

hence members' support for military actions toward targets beyond offenders. Moreover, given that the initial offender still seems to have a central role for victims, members of the offender's groups may distance themselves openly from the attitudes and behavior of the actual offender to prevent further harm. For example, anecdotal evidence for such a strategy could recently be observed after the Charlie Hebdo shooting on January 7, 2015. Immediately after the attacks, Muslims around the world sharply condemned the shooting and distanced themselves from the terrorists. Such actions may hopefully help to reduce the likelihood of attacks against inculpable Muslims.

Second, understanding of what gives victims a sense of "justice being served" may also have a practical value in tailoring reconciliation procedures in the aftermath of group-based offenses. In these contexts, effective reconciliation procedures can diminish the desire for revenge and are therefore essential to prevent renewed violence (Long & Brecke, 2003). To pave the way for reconciliation it appears central to address the psychological needs of the parties involved (Nadler & Shnabel, 2008; Shnabel, Nadler, Ullrich, Dovidio, & Carmi, 2009; Shnabel & Nadler, 2011). For example, from the victim's perspective this can be achieved by initiating a dialogue with the offender in which course the offender acknowledge the wrong done to the victim (see, e.g., Strang et al., 2006). Such a procedure is increasingly used in restorative justice practices after individual harm-doings (e.g., Bazemore, 1998; Wenzel, Okimoto, Feather, & Platow, 2008). However, for group-based offenses, the present work emphasizes how important it is that the original offender and other members of the offender's group express understanding of the harm suffered by the victim. Remember, only when the offender and the target understood why revenge was taken, victims actually experienced satisfaction. Thus, after offenses committed by a single member of a highly entitative group, it may not be sufficient if only this specific offender reacts to the injustice done to the victim in the course of the reconciliation procedure. Rather, it seems that other members of this group need to be involved, too, to effectively address the victim's needs. Reconciliation procedures

should therefore create situations which enable such an exchange between victims, offenders, and other members (perhaps as representatives) of the offender's group. Relatedly, these insights may also find application in victim-centered restorative practices within legal procedures (e.g., under law doctrines of conspiracy).

Taken together, research on displaced revenge, or more generally, group-based retribution should ultimately guide the development of practical measures to prevent, combat, and solve conflicts between groups. Psychologists, in particular, have an important role in informing and implementing such procedures in the aftermath of group-based violence. In an exemplary manner, this section should therefore delineate the applicability of research on displaced revenge in different domains. It goes without saying that development of effective measures against group-based violence requires further research on the exact content of the message associated with displaced revenge (see Section 5.3.1). If we exactly know what victims hope to achieve with revenge (e.g., a change in the offender's/target's attitudes), practices can be better tailored to effectively address these needs before victims actually engage in displaced revenge.

5.5 Conclusion

Displaced revenge is a social phenomenon that—despite its pervasiveness—has long been neglected by psychological research. This Dissertation seeks to advance our understanding of this phenomenon, its motivational forces and emotional consequences. Five studies demonstrate that revenge taken against innocent targets is capable to bring justice to avengers. More specifically, results show that displaced revenge leads to more justice-related satisfaction when (a) the offender's group is perceived as highly entitative or, more precisely, when its members are perceived as similar and interactive, (b) the offender's group continues to exist in its original form, and (c) when both, the original offender and the target of revenge understand why revenge was taken. This Dissertation integrates theoretical and empirical

work in the field of justice psychology and research on group-based retribution. The current findings may therefore be insightful in several ways for both domains.

With regard to psychological justice research, the present work extends findings of the dynamics and emotional consequences of revenge on an interpersonal level (i.e., direct revenge) to intergroup contexts. Results suggest that a purely retributive account is not sufficient to explain instances of displaced revenge. Instead, displaced revenge just like direct revenge appears to entail a message (“don’t mess with me!”). Only if this message is correctly understood by the offender and target, does displaced revenge lead to feelings of satisfaction and the experience of “justice achieved.” In this sense, displaced revenge can be conceived as an act of communication between the victim, target, and offender. As such, the present findings are in line with philosophical theories on punishment (e.g., Duff, 2001; Nozick, 1981).

Regarding scholarly work in the field of group-based retribution (or more broadly intergroup aggression), this Dissertation adds to the previous literature on displaced revenge by demonstrating that the entitativity of offender’s group does not only impact the likelihood of displaced revenge, but also avengers’ satisfaction after displaced revenge. More generally, the findings emphasize the pivotal role of entitativity within group-based conflicts. This is the first work that manipulates similarity (between individuals) and interaction (among individuals) independently from each other to examine their roles as determinants of displaced revenge. Contrary to prior theorizing, results show that both features are relevant to make displaced revenge satisfying. This finding therefore highlights the importance to account for similarity and interaction in future research. Additionally, and interestingly, for successful revenge after victimization of members of a highly entitative group, it is still important that the original offender does not disappear, but receives the message embedded in revenge. This is remarkable, given that previous work suggested that members of highly

entitative groups are psychologically interchangeable for perceivers (e.g., Crawford et al., 2002; Waytz & Young, 2012).

On a broader scale, this Dissertation advances our understanding of the nature of violent group-based conflicts, including terrorism and counter-terrorism. In examining the dynamics of displaced revenge we can moreover gain intriguing insights into how “displaced” vengeful desires can be construed, exploited, or manipulated by authorities and elites in a way that warrants them support for military interventions against entire groups.

On a closing note, it shall be emphasized that psychology does not only play an important role in understanding the escalation of violence, but also in guiding the development and implementation of measures to eventually prevent violence. In this vein, the present insights may add a further piece to the puzzle about the nature of violent group conflicts and their prevention. As Mark Twain put it, “[revenge] is powerful sweet.” Indeed it is, and even so if it is not directed against the person who harmed us.

6 REFERENCES

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7 DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Zahlreiche Beispiele aus der Geschichte und dem aktuellen Weltgeschehen verdeutlichen, dass sich Rachereaktionen häufig nicht gegen den ursprünglichen Täter richten, sondern gegen dritte, unschuldige Personen. Die sogenannte 'verschobene Rache' ist ein zentraler Bestandteil intergruppaler Konflikte und kann verheerende Folgen nach sich ziehen. Gesellschaftlich wird die Rache an Unschuldigen häufig als unmoralisch sowie ungerecht wahrgenommen und trägt somit wesentlich zur Verschärfung von Konflikten bei. Die bisherige Forschung zu Vergeltungsaktionen im Gruppenkontext untersuchte primär die Faktoren, welche die Tendenz zu einer verschobenen Rache begünstigen. Ungeklärt ist hingegen noch, ob eine solche verschobene Rache mit dem Gefühl von Genugtuung und wiederhergestellter Gerechtigkeit einhergehen und unter welchen Umständen dies der Fall sein kann. Die vorliegende Dissertation widmet sich eben diesen Fragestellungen, indem Erkenntnisse über das Auftreten einer verschobenen Rache um eine gerechtigkeitspsychologische Perspektive erweitert werden.

Die Forschung zu den sozialen und individuellen Funktionen von Rache im Kontext interpersoneller Verstöße beschäftigt sich mit der Frage, inwiefern ein Akt der Rache zu dem Gefühl der Genugtuung beitragen kann (Funk, McGeer, & Gollwitzer, 2014; Gollwitzer & Denzler, 2009; Gollwitzer, Meder, & Schmitt, 2011). Dabei geht man von der Prämisse aus, dass Rache eine funktionale und zielgerichtete Reaktion auf subjektiv erlebte Ungerechtigkeit ist. Aus dieser Annahme lässt sich ableiten, dass die Genugtuung, die mit einer Rachereaktion einhergeht, indirekt Rückschlüsse auf die motivationalen Wurzeln zulässt, also dem, was sich Individuen von der Ausübung einer Rache erhoffen und was ihnen letztendlich das Gefühl vermittelt, dass die Gerechtigkeit wiederhergestellt wurde. Im Einklang mit theoretischen Überlegungen (z.B. French, 2001; Miller, 2001) lassen die empirischen Befunde insgesamt

den Schluss zu, dass Rache besonders zufriedenstellend ist, wenn sie dem Täter eine Botschaft übermittelt ('Mit mir darfst Du so etwas nicht machen!').

Die bisherige sozialpsychologische Forschung zu Vergeltungsaktionen im Gruppenkontext konnte zeigen, dass eine solche verschobene Rache umso wahrscheinlicher ist, je entitativer die Tätergruppe vom Opfer wahrgenommen wird (Gaertner, Iuzzini, & O'Mara, 2008; Newheiser, Sakaowa, & Dovidio, 2012; Stenstrom, Lickel, Denson, & Miller, 2008). Entitativität bezeichnet dabei das Ausmaß, wonach eine Gruppe von Personen als eine miteinander verbundene kohärente Einheit wahrgenommen wird (Campbell, 1958). Neuere Betrachtungen legen darüber hinaus nahe, dass sich Entitativität sowohl aus der Wahrnehmung von sozialen Interaktionen als auch der Ähnlichkeit der Gruppenmitglieder speist (Ip, Chiu, & Wan, 2006). Die Entitativität hat zahlreiche Auswirkungen auf die Bewertung einer Gruppe und auf das Verhalten dieser gegenüber. So zeigt sich beispielsweise, dass Entitativität zu einer verstärkten Zuschreibung von kollektiver Verantwortlichkeit und Schuld führt. Anderen Mitgliedern der Tätergruppe wird demnach, auch ohne aktive Beteiligung, eine indirekte Rolle beim Zustandekommen der Handlung des Täters zugeschrieben. Entitativität kann somit eine Legitimation für die verschobene Rache bieten. Die bisherigen Befunde zu verschobener Rache resultieren hauptsächlich aus Erkenntnissen der Intergruppenforschung, vernachlässigen aber gerechtigkeitspsychologische Aspekte weitgehend. Diese Verbindung beider Forschungstraditionen trägt aber—an der Schwelle von interpersonalem zu intergruppalem Racheverhalten—entscheidend zum Verständnis des Gesamtphänomens 'Rache' und der Dynamik von Konflikten bei. An dieser Stelle setzt die vorliegende Dissertation an und untersucht, ob und unter welchen Umständen eine verschobene Rache mit dem Gefühl der Genugtuung und wiederhergestellten Gerechtigkeit einhergehen kann. Diesem Vorgehen liegt die Annahme zugrunde, dass eine verschobene Rache die Funktion erfüllt, dem Täter und seiner Gruppe eine Botschaft zu

übermitteln. Demzufolge sollte eine verschobene Rache also zufriedenstellender sein, wenn ein stärkerer Zusammenhalt (beispielsweise in Form häufiger Interaktion und Kommunikation) zwischen den Mitgliedern dieser Gruppe wahrgenommen wird, und damit eine effektive Übermittlung der Botschaft gewährleistet werden kann. Zur Überprüfung dieser Annahmen wurden die Auswirkungen verschobener Rache auf die gerechtigkeitsbezogene Genugtuung in fünf Studien untersucht, die in zwei Manuskripten beschrieben werden.

Die Hauptfragestellung des ersten Manuskripts ist, ob eine verschobene Rache zu dem Gefühl der Genugtuung und wiederhergestellten Gerechtigkeit führen kann. In drei Studien zeigt sich, dass Rächer mehr Genugtuung (aber nicht weniger Bedauern) empfinden, wenn die Gruppe des Täters als hoch entitativ wahrgenommen wird. Darüber hinaus legen die Ergebnisse der dritten Studie nahe, dass Gruppenmitglieder sowohl eine Ähnlichkeit in oberflächlichen Merkmalen als auch ein hohes Maß an sozialer Interaktion miteinander aufweisen müssen.

Im Rahmen des zweiten Manuskriptes wurde untersucht, ob eine verschobene Rache ausschließlich retributiv motiviert ist oder dem Täter und seiner Gruppe möglicherweise eine Botschaft übermittelt werden soll. In einem ersten Schritt wurde nachgewiesen, dass eine verschobene Rache zu einem größeren Empfinden von Genugtuung führt, wenn der ursprüngliche Täter—nach wie vor—Mitglied der Gruppe ist. Wenn der Täter die Gruppe hingegen verlassen oder sich die Gruppe aufgelöst hatte, führte eine verschobene Rache zu weniger Genugtuung. Dieses Ergebnis deutet darauf hin, dass eine verschobene Rache nicht zufriedenstellend ist, wenn dadurch lediglich ein anderes Gruppenmitglied bestraft wird. Vielmehr muss als eine entscheidende Voraussetzung, dass eine Botschaft gegebenenfalls an den Täter übermittelt werden kann, die Gruppe in ihrer ursprünglichen Form bestehen bleiben. In einem zweiten Schritt konnte die Annahme, dass verschobene Rache dazu dient, eine Botschaft zu übermitteln, bekräftigt werden. In diesem Zusammenhang wurde gezeigt,

dass Rächer mehr Genugtuung empfinden, wenn der Täter und das Ziel der Rache zu verstehen geben, dass sie wissen, warum das Opfer verschobene Rache ausgeübt hat.

Insgesamt legen die Befunde der vorliegenden Dissertation nahe, dass die verschobene Rache ein zielgerichtetes und funktionales Verhalten ist, welches dazu dient, dem Täter und dem 'Opfer' der Rache eine Botschaft zu übermitteln ('Mit mir dürft ihr so etwas nicht machen!').

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8 DANKSAGUNG

In den letzten Jahren haben mich viele Menschen begleitet und auf unterschiedliche Weise maßgeblich zum Entstehen dieser Arbeit beigetragen.

Ein großer Dank gilt vor allem meinem Anleiter Prof. Dr. Mario Gollwitzer. Dafür, dass er diese Arbeit betreut und mich in meinem Promotionsvorhaben stets unterstützt hat. Er war für mich in den vergangenen Jahren nicht nur ein wertvoller Ansprechpartner, von dem ich Vieles gelernt habe, sondern er hat meine fachliche sowie persönliche Entwicklung entscheidend mitgeprägt. Ich danke ihm dafür, dass er jederzeit für ein Gespräch zur Verfügung stand und immer ein offenes Ohr für meine Anliegen und Probleme hatte. Prof. Dr. Gerd Bohner möchte ich für seine Bereitschaft danken, diese Arbeit zu begutachten.

Außerdem möchte ich mich bei allen ehemaligen und aktuellen Mitgliedern der AG 'Psychologische Methodenlehre' für die schöne gemeinsame Zeit, all die zahlreichen inspirierenden, sinnvollen und auch sinnfreien Gespräche bedanken. Insbesondere danke ich auch den vielen fleißigen studentischen Hilfskräften, ohne deren Einsatz und unermüdliches Engagement die Durchführung der Studien nicht realisierbar gewesen wäre.

Besonderer Dank gilt Judith Braun und Gunnar Lemmer, die im Verlauf der letzten Jahre zu guten Freunden geworden sind und mich mit Ratschlägen und wertvollen Anregungen stets unterstützt haben. Peter Nauroth möchte ich an dieser Stelle für die konstruktiven Rückmeldungen und all die frühmorgendlichen Gespräche im Institut danken.

Ein weiterer Dank gilt den Mitgliedern der AG 'Sozialpsychologie' und des Graduiertenkollegs 'Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit' für die Vielzahl förderlicher Diskussionen und Gespräche, auch abseits der Kolloquien.

Meinen Freundinnen und Freunden bin ich dankbar dafür, dass sie u.a. mit ihrem Humor und ihrer Offenheit für den notwendigen Ausgleich zur Promotion gesorgt haben.

Abschließend möchte ich mich in besonderer Weise bei meiner Familie bedanken, die mich mit ihrem Verständnis, ihrer fortwährenden Zuversicht sowie liebevollen und herzlichen Unterstützung während der gesamten Zeit motiviert und begleitet hat.

9 ANGABEN ZUR PERSON

Dieser Abschnitt enthält persönliche Daten. Er ist deshalb nicht Bestandteil der Online-Veröffentlichung.

10 ERKLÄRUNG DES VERFASSERS

Ich versichere, dass ich meine Dissertation

“Revenge tastes sweet, even if it is not directed against the person who harmed us:

An Examination of Justice-Related Satisfaction after Displaced Revenge”

selbstständig, ohne unerlaubte Hilfe angefertigt, und mich keiner anderen als der von mir ausdrücklich bezeichneten Quellen und Hilfen bedient habe.

Die Dissertation wurde in der jetzigen oder einer ähnlichen Form noch bei keiner anderen Hochschule eingereicht und hat noch keinen sonstigen Prüfungszwecken gedient.

Marburg,

Arne Sjöström

Diese Arbeit wurde durch die assoziierte Mitgliedschaft im DFG-Graduiertenkolleg 'Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit' (GRK 884) an den Universitäten Marburg und Bielefeld sowie durch ein Stipendium des Fachbereichs Psychologie der Philipps-Universität Marburg gefördert.

Teile dieser Dissertation wurden in folgenden Fachzeitschriften publiziert:

Sjöström, A., & Gollwitzer, M. (2015). Displaced revenge: Can revenge taste “sweet” if it aims at a different target? *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 56, 191–202.
doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2014.09.016